

Sister Mary of the Cross

Shepherdess of La Salette

by Fr. Paul Gouin





"We judge the Apparition of the Blessed Virgin to two shepherds on September 19, 1846, on a mountain in the Alps, in the parish of La Salette...shows all the signs of the truth and the faithful have grounds for believing it indubitable and certain,"
as stated in a formal declaration
by the Bishop of Grenoble,
after five years of study and investigation.

Sister Mary of the Cross

**Shepherdess of La Salette
Melanie Calvat**

**Member of the Third Order of St. Dominic
and Victim of Jesus**

by Fr. Paul Gouin

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“Melanie revealed her Secret at the time which was indicated to her, although she knew that such an action would draw towards her the wrath of those who having lost all moral sense were attached to the chariot of the Masonic sect.”

L'Osservatore Romano, 25th December, 1904

*"... and you will
make this known
to all my people."*





MELANIE AT MOULINS (FRANCE) AT 72 YEARS OLD.

Véritables Portraits.



PREFACE 1

In the parish of La Salette in the diocese of Grenoble, Our Blessed Lady appeared to two uneducated children Melanie Mathieu (Calvat),(1) aged 14 years and Maximin Giraud, aged 11, on September 19, 1846.

At the time of the Apparition, France had suffered a revolution in the political order followed by a revolt against God and the Church. Even in the rural areas of France few people bothered to go to Mass on Sundays. One has only to read the life of St John Mary Vianney, Curé of Ars, to realise the spiritual plight of the people.

Our Lady told the two children in La Salette of evils threatening her people especially because of blasphemy and the profanation of Sunday.

After five years of careful examination of the facts, the Church authorised the Cult of Our Lady of La Salette in 1851.

This book tells the story of La Salette and the eventful life of Melanie.

We know that St Bernadette had the call to heroic sanctity but what about Melanie?

Readers will have to judge for themselves!

+ Joseph F. CLEARY
Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham
(Written during Easter Week, 1981)

(1) Melanie's father Pierre Calvat so called Mathieu. It is even under the name of Mathieu that Melanie was registered at the Office of Civil status and even at the Church in Corps

PREFACE 2

When asked to write this foreword, my reaction was one of dismay. I felt a certain prejudice against the person of Melanie Calvat from what I had read in the past. Before receiving the present volume (Italian edition) I turned again to "*The Sun Her Mantle*" by John Beevers (Browne & Nolan, 1953) in order to re-read the section on Our Lady of La Salette. Although he believes, as I also do, in the truth of La Salette, the impression left by what he writes on Melanie, of her long life after the visitation of Our Lady, seems to be one of a sad failure.

I was, however, helped by the writings of Fr. Lepidi, O.P. and Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange O.P. I felt that such careful and judicious scholars could not have been easily deceived in such a delicate and important matter, which involves Our Lady's honour.

The present volume therefore is very valuable in putting the case for the genuineness of Melanie Calvat in her life as a Religious and in her writings during that long period. The author, using original letters and documents, some unknown until more recently, brings out the sincerity and humility of Melanie. She has not the brilliance of St Bernadette, whether at Lourdes or Nevers, and perhaps she will never have. *However* the fact remains of her living true to her vocation through so many difficulties, trials and humiliations during long, trying years.

In a case such as this, we must surely trust those who were in contact with her over long periods, especially Monsignor Petagna, Bishop of Castellamare di Stabia and Monsignor Zola, Bishop of Lecce. It would be strange if they could really have been deceived in considering her to be a deeply spiritual person, called to suffer a kind of spiritual eclipse before the world and even before the Church.

St Bernardette was told by Our Lady that she would have to suffer in this world, but she would be happy in the next. However her life, though often a martyrdom, was spent in the peace and security of a convent, which was a great aid to her spiritual advancement. Melanie on the contrary, was as it were, chased from pillar to post, like her Divine Master, with nowhere to lay her head. She received no comfort from men or even from the Church authorities, except in a few cases. She has no security except in her unshakeable confidence in Our Lady. Rather like her fellow-countryman, St Benedict Joseph Labre, she has to live the life of a kind of spiritual fugitive. Surely this must have been what Our Lady chose for her disciple and witness. In this way La Salette, in spite of all that might be said or done against it, would survive. Her unusual and troubled life could not but keep before the eyes of all, the fact of La Salette, and of course its Message for the Church and the World. It was a Message of sorrow and disenchantment for modern Europe and especially for France, so soon to face 1870, 1914 and 1939

Wars. It was a call, as always, to repentance. Lourdes and Fatima have simply endorsed it. So the way for Melanie must be the Way of the Cross, not hidden in the cloister, but wandering across Europe, for all to see, to scorn and to criticise, even to persecute, whilst all the time Melanie goes her way, protesting, not her own innocence, but the truth of the Mystery of La Salette. The Mystery of La Salette is especially the Mystery of the Cross, and bearing the name Sister Mary of the Cross, Melanie gave her testimony in a long life of sorrow and humiliation.

May the present English edition of this book help readers to obtain a deeper understanding of the Mystery of the Cross in individual lives and especially in the life of Melanie Calvat.

Monsignor Thomas A. Ronchetti
St Joseph's, Tadcaster, Yorkshire, Diocese of Leeds
(Written during March, 1981)

PREFACE 3

Some months back I had the opportunity to read the whole autobiography of Melanie, the shepherdess of La Salette written by Ven. Canon Annibale di Francia at Messina (1897).

I was deeply impressed, not so much by the supernatural, by the extraordinary gifts that the little girl received as by that lively desire for humiliation accepted with joy for love of Jesus Crucified.

The concealment and practice of virtue, typically and exclusively Christian, that is humility. I had heard about the apparitions of the Weeping Madonna on the Mountain of La Salette, of the perplexities that rose about her, even in the mind of the Holy Curé of Ars but I did not have any knowledge of the events, of the contents of the "revelations" and of the great, contrary emotions that arose, especially in the French Episcopate. Therefore it was with so much greater interest that I read the proof sheets of this book which I feel honoured to present to the readers of the Italian language in the accurate translation made by Mrs Colomba Martella.

The original is the chef d'oeuvre of Fr. Paul Gouin (1885-1968); the fruit of fifty good years of patient researches, it constitutes a unique documentation of manuscripts and about 850 letters written by the shepherdess of La Salette herself.

This biography with its inescapable weight of rigid documentation finally rehabilitates the shepherdess of La Salette, Sr Mary of the Cross, the depository of messages and secrets received from the Blessed Virgin in the Apparition of the 19th September 1846, and also the mission entrusted to her.

The great theologian P. Garrigou-Lagrange wrote to the author Fr. Gouin (1st September 1957) in this vein: "I am inclined to believe that Melanie remained faithful to her mission right up to her death" and that is the foundation of the "Work of the Apostles of the Last Time" foretold by Saint Louis Grignon de Montfort.

The communications from the Blessed Virgin during the above-mentioned apparition consist of:

a) a warning-message to all Christian people against blasphemy and transgression of the Commandments of God and of the Church with the threat and prophecy of penalties;

b) two messages directed separately first to Melanie and then to the little boy Maximin who accompanied her, the so-called "secrets"; Melanie revealed hers from 1858; Maximin delivered his to Pius IX in writing;

c) a "Rule for Religious Life" to give to people really disposed to follow it.

Melanie's "secret": the heart-rending appeal to the clergy, its prophetic language, its announcements of fearful punishments were found to be extremely severe, ensuring them the clear hostility of the French Episcopate. (or Hierarchy)

"As generous rain lays the dust that the winds have raised, so humiliations,

persecutions and privations reduce the soul to its nothingness" wrote Sr Mary of the Cross.

Exiled from France, she wandered to England to the Carmel of Darlington (1854-1860), an interval of several months in Cefalonia (1863) and finally the paternal welcome from His Lordship Mgr Petagna, Bishop of Castellamare di Stabia (1867-1884); again in France (1884-1892); and thence to Italy, to St Peter di Galatina (received by Bishop Zola of Lecce) (between Lecce and Otranto); at Gallipoli (1895); at Messina, guest of Canon Annibale di Francia (September 1897-1898), at Moncalieri (1898-1899), from there to France till 1904 when she returned to Italy, to Altamura where Bishop Cecchini, formerly a Dominican of the Shrine of Pompei welcomed her; and at Altamura she expired on the 15th December 1904.

Her life is outwardly an extraordinary adventure with flashes of the stormy politics of that period, with the misdeeds of villains and the sincere goodwill of noble minds.

Indeed the main story of her life (though nearly unknown) contained in these pages reviews men with their defects and those shocks that from France gravely disturbed the Rome of the Pontiffs.

In the middle of so many stormy events, Sr Mary of the Cross suffers and prays, has always present before her the Virgin of La Salette, the dream of the forest, the mystical marriage in the Church of St Roch.

"Right from her earliest infancy, introduced into the life of Grace, enlightened by that same truth, purified by the trials of her last and very hard year of service (as shepherdess) wholly imbued with the spirit of Jesus Christ and of Christ Crucified; by Him and with Him offered as a victim, she entered into participation of the divine union, drawing near to spiritual marriage".

"In this way she was already prepared for the apparition of the Blessed Virgin, for the mission entrusted to her. She lived "the philosophy of the Cross" as did St Augustine after reading the letters of St Paul, the essential synthesis of Christianity and she is the mistress of humility in confessing her own insufficiency and imploring the grace: "The philosophy of the Cross and of Christian humility" distinguished mark of true spirituality, because the way of humility comes only from Christ.

Melanie with her spirit comes back among us: this biography, so well documented, frequently makes her voice heard, a warning rendered up-to-date by parallels with the Secret of Fatima.

And the invitation is always the same, our conversion, the thought of our eternal salvation.

Monsignor Francesco Spadafora

Professor at the Lateran ROMA

(Preface from the Italian Edition printed in 1978)

SOME BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ABOUT Mr l'ABBÉ PAUL GOUIN

the author of the biography of *The Shepherdess of La Salette*,
by Mr F. Corteville, President of the Association,
published in the previous editions.

Born at PRECIGNE (Sarthe) Diocese of Le Mans, in 1885, Abbé Paul GOUIN received the holy Orders on the 5th June 1909. Professor at the little Seminary of LA FLECHE he became Vicar at SAINTE COLOMBE from 1911 to 1914. Visiting his parish he remarked a distressing 'dechristianisation'. What is its fundamental cause? Warned by the reading of "CELLE QUI PLEURE" (The One who cries) by Léon BLOY, he thinks that practical atheism which is propagated everywhere is due to the withdrawal of divine graces which make sterile the apostolate. Why? One has refused to practice the *Rule* of the ORDER OF THE MOTHER OF GOD, dictated on the 19th September 1846 by the VIRGIN MARY on the Mountain of LA SALETTE.

With his friend Abbé MOLLIÈRE, who died on the 6th February 1948, it is the search of all books and documents which could enlighten the so gloomy question of LA SALETTE. Soon numerous gathered works, will enable Jacques MARITAIN, professor at INSTITUT CATHOLIQUE DE PARIS, to write a study on the HAPPENINGS OF LA SALETTE which will be given to POPE BENEDICT XV, on the 2nd April 1918.

Appointed Vicar at SAINT MARTIN de PONTLIEUE, LE MANS, Abbé GOUIN meets Emile BAUMAN, professor at the Lycée of LE MANS and author of PAIX DU SEPTIÈME JOUR (Peace of the Seventh Day), commentary of the Prophecy of LA SALETTE. E. BAUMAN introduces the young vicar of PONTLIEU to Abbé CORNUAU, retired in LE MANS, former chaplain of the FRENCH NAVY and friend of Léon BLOY and J. MARITAIN.

The study of J. MARITAIN examined by Cardinal BILLOT and Rev. Fr. LE FLOCH is judged inopportune. However it should have been necessary to examine the full significance and the spirit of the Decree of 21st December 1915 which prohibited to comment the SECRET OF LA SALETTE, and this had not been done. "One can perfectly study the so famous PROPHECY, provided one does not attack the authority of the bishops" has written Abbé GOUIN himself. But Cardinal BILLOT was declaring: "WHEN PARIS WILL BE BURNT AND MARSEILLE ENGULFED I will give you all the Imprimatur"!

In 1916, Abbé GOUIN went to DIOU (Allier) at Abbé COMBE's who had MELANIE as Parishioner in the last years of her life. After the death of the Parish priest of DIOU, in 1927, Abbé GOUIN collaborates with canon THIERRY emeritus Professor of the UNIVERSITY of

LOUVAIN, who has inherited some documents from Abbé COMBE. Canon THIERRY continues in another connection the work of MOTHER SAINT JEAN started at MARANVILLE (Haute-Marne), Cardinal MERCIER having given him approbation for a founding of THE ORDER OF THE MOTHER OF GOD at LOUVAIN. Abbé GOUIN first Parish Priest at VERNIE appointed at AVOISE in 1924 will effect several journeys to BELGIUM and in 1931 will become Chaplain of a small religious community of the ORDER OF THE MOTHER OF GOD, founded in ANJOU, at SAINT LAMBERT DU LATTAY by Miss Germaine BLANCHARD.

The documents of SAINT LAMBERT collected by the ASSOCIATION DES ENFANTS DE NOTRE DAME DE LA SALETTE and of SAINT LOUIS GRIGNION DE MONTFORT after the death of Miss BLANCHARD on 17th January 1957, will enable a beginning of publication in a French magazine printed at first in the UNITED STATES: "L'IMPARTIAL". Later on the Association under the inspiration and with the assistance of Abbé GOUIN publishes a series of books in the "COLLECTION POUR SERVIR A L'HISTOIRE REELLE DE LA SALETTE" (Collection to serve the Real History of La Salette).

While in 1961, 1963, 1964, the Association was holding its General Assembly at AVOISE itself, in 1958 Abbé GOUIN went to BELGIUM then in 1959 to ARS and LA SALETTE accompanied by the President of the Association. A stock of exceptional Archives have been given by Abbé GOUIN to the Association in October 1966 while his collection of books and other documents have been sent to the ABBEY of SOLESMES.

The population of AVOISE has rendered a deserved homage to the one who has been their Parish priest for forty five years at his funerals on the 13th December 1968. The humility and discretion of Abbé GOUIN have not permitted to many to realise the great importance of his work as historian in favour of the cause of LA SALETTE, that a Monsignor BEAUSSART, a R. P. GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE had appreciated at their just value.

F. Corteville



General view of the Parish of La Salette, of
The Mountain of Apparition, and surrounding mountains.
(Taken from the Chapelle Saint-Sebastien,
at five kilometres from Corpo).



PORTRAIT OF MELANIE CALVAT, SHEPHERDESS OF LA SALETTE, PHOTOGRAPHED WITHOUT HER KNOWLEDGE, ON THE 8th SEPTEMBER 1902, ON THE PRECISE PLACE OF THE APPARITION

“Her humility was always put to trial when one was wishing to do something for her: “But my dear Father, before to photograph people in spite of themselves, one should always ask permission””



DEATH OF MELANIE CALVAT DURING THE NIGHT OF THE 14th to the 15th DECEMBER 1904 (Reproduction of a Painting painted on order and according to the instructions of Mgr Cecchini, Bishop of Altamura and Acquaviva.

PART ONE

A CRUCIFIED CHILDHOOD

TO KNOW MELANIE

One evening, in June 1893, a woman was walking down the hill of Fourvières into Lyons.

It was the time when, whatever the season, the mist rises from the wharves of the Rhône and the Saône in the darkened city, the time when the churches are closed for the night. This woman, this pilgrim, must have spent the whole day in the basilica; as she walked she kept on praying: her air of recollection, her hands clasped under her long coat lead one to surmise this. She is dressed in black. An old-fashioned hat, or rather, a cap covers her head; a large veil trails down her back. A widow? A nun? She may be sixty. She walks slightly leaning forward because of her short sight. Yet she finds her bearings unhesitatingly, her steps are steady and quiet. When she reaches the corner of Bombarde street, between the Cathedral and the Law Courts—the mercy of God facing human justice—firmly, and as if expected, she goes into the Hostel of Joan of Arc.

The welcome she found there was a great source of comfort. This woman was going through one of the worst torments a christian soul can endure.

In answer to your question, she writes (1) “I will never forget the 3rd of June 1893, the day ... when Mgr Perrand, the bishop of Autun, made it known to me that I was to be refused the Sacraments in the diocese of Autun, without a single mention of the reason why: nothing, nothing at all.

I feared as much. Mgr Perrand insists that I hand over to him the transfer of property which Fr. Ronjon made out to me for the religious order of the Apostles of the Last Days. Yet, in all conscience, could I have at my disposal the property of the Mother of God? Certainly not! I prefer to suffer for the sake of justice ... Deprived of the sacraments, of Holy Communion, I was hungry for my God, my strength, my light, my counsel, my way. I could not take any more. I left for Lyon-Fourvières. In this fine sanctuary I found comfort. I went to confession, and received my most beloved Jesus and I prayed very much for my three persecutors: Mgr Perrand, Fr. Dessus and Fr. Gautheron. It was late and I did not know Lyons; I prayed and then went down the hill, still praying, and Joan of Arc guided me. Lyons, the Hostel of Joan of Arc, 4 and 6 Bombarde street, between the Cathedral and the

(1) Letter to Mr. Schmid, 30th November, 1895.

law-courts, there I spent my night in good company. The lady of the hostel was very good to me and would not take any money ... How much I have prayed and still pray for this Christian family ...

In the month of July I went back to Fourvières for confession and to receive Holy Communion.

I left Châlons-sur-Saône on the 17th July for Italy—there the refusal of the Sacraments could no longer affect me ...”

So who is this old woman? She signs, “Sister Mary of the Cross, née Melanie Calvat”. She is the shepherdess of La Salette.

To this old woman, at the tender age of fourteen when she was looking after cows on the mountainside, the Holy Virgin appeared and spoke commanding her to pass Her words on to all her people. That was on the 19th September, 1846. For fifty years despite her weakness, her loneliness, her poverty, she has struggled to fulfil this task without success. For the third time, the reprobation of a high ecclesiastical authority has fallen on her. It is the final blow.

As early as 1854, Mgr Ginoulhiac, the bishop of Grenoble, had stated that she was “deluded and proud”, and had objected to her taking vows with the Sisters of Providence at Corenc, where she had completed her novitiate, and had sent her into exile in England.

In the winter of 1878–79, in Rome, Mgr Fava, who had succeeded to the bishopric of Grenoble, had set aside the Rule which she said had been dictated to her by the Holy Virgin for the benefit of the Apostles of the Last Days who, with a number of nuns, were to serve at the Sanctuary of La Salette; thus completely ignoring the original order given by the Pope. He succeeded in throwing suspicion on the shepherdess in the eyes of Roman Congregations. The booklet, a simple account of the Apparition, published that same year at Lecce (Italy) with the “imprimatur” of the local bishop was discredited and its distribution stopped. The Bishop incurred a reprimand and Melanie was requested to keep silence by a member of the Congregation of the Holy Office.

Now this time she is threatened from all sides, struck in the very marrow of her spiritual life, and at the very essence of her calling.

She has been bold enough to go to court against the executors of the late Fr. Ronjon’s Will, the representatives of the episcopal authorities in Autun; she has stood up against a famous and venerated Church authority, a Superior of the French Oratory, an academician soon to become a Cardinal. She has laid herself open to the clashes of financial interests, to the ambiguities of legal arguments; she will come out of this compromised. The only thing left to do is to withdraw and to keep silent. She goes back into hiding in Italy.

After ten more years of travelling, and of hidden works, she will go back there for one last time “to lay her bones to rest.” Oblivion will surround her and leave her writings buried and over the many facts collected on La Salette

a curtain of misunderstandings and of disturbing contradictions will be drawn.

The whole story may be summed up thus; the credibility of the witnesses is in question. As for the account of the apparition, their sincerity is not denied. But the words of the Holy Virgin which they bring us, these are said to be dubious. We know these speeches to be in three parts: a first message, which is usually called "the public statement"—a warning for the whole Christian people against their blasphemy and their forgetfulness of the commandments of God and of the Church, and this was recited on the spot word for word by the two children who were questioned separately. The second part of Our Lady's discourse consists of two other speeches, the first of which was addressed to Melanie and the second to Maximin (2). They are called "The Secrets". Melanie was ordered to reveal her "secret" but only from 1858 onwards; Maximin delivered his, in writing, to Pope Pius X only. And finally comes the third part: Melanie had heard a Rule of Religious Life being dictated to her, and this Rule she persisted in divulging only to those who were truly disposed to follow it.

Right from the start, such delays in the passing on of the revelations, such slight variations in the manner of their diffusion, brought about astonishment, wariness, and objections.

Melanie's "Secret", her prophetic language, her painful reproaches and her moving appeal to the clergy, her proclamations of the punishments of Divine Justice, were considered strangely severe.

Could the Holy Virgin be so familiar—almost trivial—in her first speech, talking in "patois" of potatoes and spoilt wheat and be so frightening, so tragic in her second speech ...?—"It seems," Melanie will say later on (3), "that there are people who believe it their duty to see that Almighty God does not say things which are too severe or shocking when He lowers Himself to talk to His creatures. They allow the Good Lord to complain about farmers working on Sunday, blasphemy or the missing of Mass ... but ... they do not allow Him to complain about the clergy being too fond of money ..."

Melanie defends her "Secret" bitingly perhaps, precisely because it is so stinging! What impertinence! From a mere witness of an apparition, she has turned into a prophet. The words of the prophet Ezechiel to the false prophets might apply to her equally.

"Woe to you who are guided by your own spirit!—Your visions are empty words, your prophecies lies—you say, "the Lord has said" ... when the Lord has not spoken" (4).

(2) With Melanie there was often a little boy, Maximin Giraud, who had replaced a sick shepherd at the time and who, bored by his solitude, had come to join Melanie on the mountainside.

(3) Letter to Mr. Schmid, 25th June 1897.

(4) Ez XIII 1-14.

Revealed after the event the "Secret" and the Rule must have been her own invention . . . This girl got over-excited, she has gone astray, she is ambitious. Has she not, through the transfer of property she has obtained from the elderly priest Fr. Ronjon, at Châlons, betrayed her plan for a foundation, and stubbornly resisted the most holy bishop of Autun? She lost her court case anyway . . . her wanderings abroad are strange, to say the least. Finally the greatest care is necessary towards her and, to conclude, the less spoken of La Salette, the better.

Yet it was spoken about, and, what is worse, written about (5). Some turned to bitter reproaches concerning the "Secret" as a way to give vent to their dissatisfaction. Some enthusiastic believers tried their hand at commentaries in which truth and falsehood are freely mixed; some worried souls, fond of prophecies, further obscured matters with their adventurous conjectures; some individuals, their brains whirling with political utopian ideals, took it upon themselves to make the revelations of La Salette their own, and adding a little extra of their home-produced notions, attempted to use them to further the triumph of their own ideas and ambitions.

Melanie, however, did nothing to encourage these flights of fancy, and kept away from these people: "We must not waste our time on such matters" she said "(6) and to a priest who was carried away by "Naundorffiste" dreams, and who had sent her a leaflet he had written, she said: "At the moment, (1883) France does not want a king . . ."

"When the time is ripe, God will humble France to the utmost depths of humility, and then He will find her the right king."

Finally, on the subject of another politically-minded priest: "The devil plays with some people making them waste their life away on nonsense". In fact, whether pious writers, dreamers or controversialists, not one of them ever consulted Melanie personally.

Her letters are proof of the caution with which she gave her testimony together with her wish to see the publicists draw their information from a reliable source and keep to the simple facts.

"It does not do (7)," she writes, "to distract, (with criticisms and figments of the imagination) peoples' minds from the principal aim, which is to take in what is said to them and to consider the possibility of a change of heart."

And elsewhere, to one of her correspondents who urged her to give a commentary on the straightforward account of the Apparition (8):

"What would be the point? The merciful warnings of the mother of God have been disregarded, people would disregard the details I could give even more; and I should be the cause of the sins of ingratitude which the

(5) See bibliographical note in appendix.

(6) Letter to the Canon de Brandt, end of January 1883.

(7) Letter to Canon de Brandt, January, 1880.

(8) Letter to M. Schmid of the 17th March, 1897.

unbelievers would commit ...” Later still, to Fr. Combe, who was working on an overall interpretation and the construction of hypotheses on the projected dates of the prophesied events: “You’re taking a lot of trouble ... It seems to me that such a commentary is not necessary. The prophecies are not clear; some commentators have put a very, very distant event in the present or the near future ... I have read various passages in the Gospel which the fathers of the Church have not been able to explain. These points will be brought to light later” (9). To the same priest who was looking after the 2nd edition of the booklet of Lecce: “I think I made myself sufficiently clear, in French, that the 2nd edition of my booklet of Lecce must be completely bare, stripped of any insertion, however holy or useful it might appear.” And, in order to calm the impatient “exegetes” whose very zeal was a dis-service to the cause they thought they were helping, she added:

“This blunt refusal (to understand the supernatural and to submit to it) is a sign of our times, when man cannot grasp the truths which come down to him from Heaven, so high are they above him. He can neither understand nor taste the essence of these truths, and his ignorance leads him to mock them.” (10)

This prudence which never abandoned the witness (11) of La Salette could not prevent either attacks on the authenticity of the miracle or its defence, which was often impassioned or clumsy, producing a considerable amount of literature whose mediocrity was only matched by its abundance. This pamphlet war began with an attack by two clergymen of the diocese of Grenoble in 1851: a priest who was under a ban for his scandalous conduct (his name is Deléon and he signs himself as Donnadiou) and a parish priest of Grenoble, Fr Cartellier. Urged by a spirit of rebellion and of vengeance against their bishop, Mgr De Bruillard, they countered his first doctrinal pronouncement which gave full credibility to the miracle and his laying of the foundation stone of the sanctuary, by three successive pamphlets.

They followed this with an underhand and pernicious manoeuvre—an ambiguous prospectus distributed amongst the clergy which announced the publication of these pamphlets disguised as intellectual works (“La Salette before the Pope”, “Papal Statement”) (12) and gathered signatures indiscriminately approved by their Bishop, little listened to and little read. Deléon and Cartellier fabricated the “Lamerlière story”. Miss de Lamerlière, an eccentric old woman, walks several miles alone across the mountains despite her obesity, and, in disguise, “plays” the part of the Holy Virgin to the innocent young shepherds.

It was an outrageous slur on her faith and her honour and Miss Lamerlière

(9) Letter to Fr. Combe 10th March, 1904, letter 151 (undated).

(10) Letter to Canon de Brandt, September, 1881.

(11) When handing over his account of La Salette to Pope Pius IX 4th June 1851, Mgr de Bruillard wrote to him: “The girl, of a more tenacious disposition (than Maximin) has been entrusted to a religious community by myself and there she lives the life of an angel.”

(12) See in appendix the bibliographical note.

took the two to court. The case was carried through; the whole thing became a laughing stock.

But articles and leaflets kept pouring out, at varying intervals, according to the circumstances, and things got more and more confused; then, with the passing of time, progressive misrepresentations dissolved it all into a dim haze.

The initial mistake lay in not resorting to the actual sources. Who passed on its Message? The girl, Melanie Calvat was its only witness. Except for Maximin—this little boy who seemed to have been her constant companion for those few days and those few days only, to strengthen her testimony—nobody was with her on the mountainside at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the 19th of September. "Who has dared hold back the mission of the witnesses?" Melanie will write later (13), "who, on the 19th of September 1846 was there to hear the sweet, clear and merciful words of the Virgin Mother?"

By confirming the credibility of the miracle of the Apparition, the successive doctrinal statements of the bishops of Grenoble, and papal seals of approval have testified to Melanie's good faith and to the lucidity of her unfailing memory. To accept only one part of the message and to cast doubt on the other parts would be to put no trust in her at all, it would follow logically that the whole message became doubtful and so would the very event of La Salette.

On what is based the distinction between what is termed "divine revelation" and what is termed "fabrication", between the miracle and the hoax? On a value judgement, which is not even explicit on the personality of the shepherdess. Who is she? Did they really know her? She is the one we must get to know, her character, her mentality, her morals, her inner life, what in her makes improbable or gives grounds for divine preference.

We must ascertain, on the evidence, not of vague hearsay, but of proven documents, whether she is a deluded woman, or an actress, or whether she was predestined to a supernatural mission.

Here are the documents, at least here is a collection of them; from Melanie's own hands and in her own handwriting, there remain a quantity of letters and three autobiographies of her childhood. What she wanted people to know about her, is all there. She did not take pride or pleasure in telling her story. Far from it.

She is by no means more proud of the graces which have been bestowed on her freely than she is ashamed of the asperity of her nature. "I am a bit wild, she says (14) ... I lack good manners ... in general I am neither pleasant nor kind". She lacks elocution too and she writes as well as speaks only when forced to by the circumstances, or ordered to by her superiors, and the task is

(13) Letter to Fr. Combe of the 16th April 1898.

(14) Letter to Mr. Schmid, 2nd June, 1894, 19th March, 1896.

performed soberly, devoid of pleasure, regretfully, sometimes most painfully: "If I had this life of mine in my hands (15), I would throw it into the deepest ocean."

If she recounts the story of the first years of her life three times and in slightly different versions, it is on the formal request of three persons whose authority over her she recognizes. And furthermore those three accounts (16) all stop before the apparition and are only told to throw light on its meaning.

Nothing matters of Melanie herself except that which is relevant to the Message of La Salette and her duty to communicate it.

"We ought always to keep to the truth so as to avoid the perversion of consciences." (17) And such is the objectivity, of this extraordinary person that it forms an absolute guarantee of her truthfulness. Let us, then, be guided by her and by her alone, and page by page, step by step, we shall reach the truth ...

THE KISS OF ST ROCH

The evening of the Apparition (19th September 1846), Melanie and Maximin led their flocks back down the mountain to their respective owners. Melanie was silent, as usual. Maximin was trembling with excitement. The little boy of ten, effusive and talkative, scatter-brained and sensitive at the same time, could not retain what he had seen and heard.

He had been extremely frightened and, his hat still on his head, grasping his stick, he had aimed stones at the "Lady's" feet (18). At the first words of that sweet and merciful voice, Melanie had been drawn towards Her and she had stood so close to the apparition that—if a few words she let out later and which were recorded in Mother de Maximy's notebook are to be believed—she could have kissed the Holy Virgin's hand, while listening to her words.

However, she is silent and Maximin is the one who speaks ... On not finding his master at once (Peter Selme, a friend of his father's, who had asked Maximin to replace a sick shepherd for a few days) he rushes over to the house of Melanie's master. Meanwhile she has driven her cows into the stable.

She ties them up with great care, and calmly tidies the stable. When her

(15) Letter to Fr. Combe (concerning the Italian version which had been left in May, 1900, at Messina) 7th June, 1899.

(16) The three autobiographies are 1°) Written in 1852, a short summary made at the convent of La Providence at Corenc at Fr. Sibillat's request. 2°) Written in Italian at Messina (1897) at the request of Canon Annibale di Francia. 3°) Written in 1900, partly a translation of the Italian version of Messina, made at the request and in answer to the questions of Fr. Combe, at Diou.

(17) Letter to Mr. Schmid, 28th October 1896.

(18) Miss de Brulais: note of 12th September, 1843. Maximin was accused of poor conduct in front of the Holy Virgin, by Melanie.

mistress, in tears having heard Maximin's story, comes and asks her: "My child, why, but why didn't you come and tell me what happened on the mountain?" Melanie answers "I did want to tell you but I wanted to get my work finished first."

Her daily chores come first ... a strange, somewhat disturbing attitude—so it would seem—the evening after such an event. Hasn't it startled her at all? She looks quiet the more Maximin looks affected. This young girl nearing fifteen, but still illiterate and to be refused her First Communion that year, can she not understand what has happened to her, what mission has now befallen her? Her silence, her slowness to react, is it indifference or recollection?

A mystery.

Yes, it is a mystery.

But the key is given by Melanie herself in the autobiographies of her childhood. The last episode alone can explain everything. For the last few months, since the previous spring, Melanie has been raised to one of the highest levels of profound contemplation. She lives a life of Divine Union. She breathes and moves spiritually in a supernatural atmosphere where the miracle of the Apparition, however striking, is no great surprise to her. And if she remains impassive, it is because she has already been in communion with The Unique and Supreme Reality.

She was very young when her instruction began, guided by a beautiful child who said he was her brother and called her "My sister, sister of my heart". All she knows of God and all things, she has learnt from him. He is her Master and her Friend. The first day He spoke to her, she asked to kiss Him. He replied that the time had not yet come.

One evening last spring, the time came.

The mystic kiss was given and received.

At the time, Melanie was in between jobs (for she had been placed as shepherdess and serving-girl before the age of seven) and was with her parents at Corps. Corps is a small Canton-town in Isère, on the road from Grenoble to Gap. Not far from the town stands a country chapel, which makes a most pleasant end to a walk in the summer time. It is named the Chapel of Saint Roch. With its small dome pierced by two narrow windows, and a small bell-tower above, it looks out over a deep, clear lake, from the top of a grassy hillock. From there, Corps is to be seen, on the edge of the plateau, at the foot of a chain of tall mountains rising step by step to snow-capped peaks. It is a delightful spot.

This was the setting of the ultimate and most decisive episode of Melanie's secret childhood.

Let her speak for herself.

One day, my mother, Julie, said to her children (19) "All go and play

(19) Her mother, brothers and sisters.

outside now; I want to be alone in the house. Go up to Saint Roch." So there I was with them, (her brothers and sisters) until we reached the chapel. Then they said to me, "Do you want to play?" I replied that I didn't know how to. So then they walked down the small hill on which the chapel of St. Roch stands, and started to play, leaving me alone. It was fun to look at the statue of St. Roch through the two little windows and I prayed to this fine saint to make the Good Lord grant me a cure for my soul, to cure me of ever again causing pain to my dearly beloved Jesus Christ and my mother. I always see her angry with me and this hurts me. And I said five Gloria Patri to Our Lord for the graces He had granted this saint.

It was then I heard the sweet, soft and comforting voice of my beloved and good little Brother calling me. "My dear Sister, sister of my heart, I am yours." I turned round quickly, my heart leapt with joy. It actually was my so-desired Brother with His angelic face and paradise shining in His eyes! He says to her, "As soon as the Almighty told me to come and play with you, after your victory (20), I came, sister of my heart." She, in her humility and ignorance, can she not understand what this victory is? Patiently, her Brother explains that at St. Michel and Quet she won a victory. Now she can start to fight. And he tells her of contradictions and other struggles for the truth. Then she reminds Him of his promise to let her kiss Him when the time came. Now the time has come.

'With a sweet smile, He told me that it would be He, not I, who would give the kiss'. "Oh! quick, quick, let's hurry, my good brother, for the love of our beloved Jesus Christ!" He kissed me on the forehead, on the lips and on the breast, He blessed me and then walked off.

Her brothers and sisters come to take her home and they all go back to the house. Her mother is angry that she did not play with the others ... This wild, silent girl always on her own is really impossible. Her father may well want to keep her at home, but she'll have to go back into service, as soon as something comes up ... The opportunity will soon present itself, and she will be placed at Ablandins, in the "commune" of La Salette.

At this point the most detailed of Melanie's autobiographies (that of 1900) comes to a stop. Why? Why does the shepherdess only recount the first fourteen years of her life? Is that a life? Yes, this last episode explains all. It is a whole life, on a supernatural level, a complete life. The narrator has no more to tell. If she has gone to that point—and to that point only—the account of her childhood serves only to persuade us to go with her along the paths of divine lessons and to prepare us for the apparition. Even then at times humorous anecdotes have no place nor meaning except as a spring-board to the mystic teachings, and by mixing the most down-to-earth realism with the

(20) Saint-Michel and Quet-en-Baumont, the two villages where she has just been in service during 1845. There she suffered greatly and had to struggle to sleep on her own, etc... She calls this year the Good Year or Year of Grace.

highest spiritual reality, they let us see both sides of human life at once. The kiss she has just received at St. Roch, this is not a beginning of divine communication, but a consecration of it. From her infancy onward, led into the life of grace, enlightened by Truth itself, purified by the trials of the last year of service which was so hard, quite saturated with the spirit of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, offered by Him and with Him as a victim, she has entered into Divine Union, she may attain the spiritual marriage.

But it is for her writings to bear witness to this. In the Italian autobiography, Melanie noted down, at the request of Canon Annibale di Francia, the experiences of her inner life. Experience is the right word. She only learned to read later on, this we know; and even then she read little, and cannot have borrowed material from authors she was not acquainted with. "I have read nothing of mystical matters", she will write to Fr. Combe 12th February 1900. She did not read a single word. She lived them. And it all started way back in her early childhood. On waking up, in the woods after the initial dream, when it already seemed to her there was nothing left of her own self but a tiny flame of desire to please her Beloved One, she could no longer remember that, as if in a flash of lightning, she had entered the solitude of deep contemplation. "And I saw, in my fanciful way, Our Divine Saviour communicating with my soul in a way I cannot describe. My senses stopped functioning altogether, it seemed they were prisoners of love. When the Almighty communicates with the soul no word is uttered, and the more the flaming arrows of divine love kindle the soul, the more they set it alight, in the same instant, with the passionate love for suffering is given in such a way that I could not tell which was the stronger of these two loves.

It was a first glimpse.

A little further on when, after her childhood illness, she spends hours and hours motionless and silent letting flood in these deep meditations in which divine mysteries are revealed to her, she becomes aware of another method, on an even higher plane, of mystic communication." In a single moment I became quite fully possessed," she said; "my mind was somehow opened, penetrated, raised up and held in the everlasting light."

"I cannot explain this method of communication with my soul. But I do know", she adds, "that the communications the merciful Lord makes with me, despite the depths of my faithlessness, are of three different kinds or modes, and the effects produced by each one are also different." And so interrupting the line of her story, she describes, one after the other, the three methods involved in her mystic communications. Here we must follow her word for word (21).

I. "The apparitions of my Brother drew me into the Love of Jesus Christ, of suffering, of being at one with the will of the King of Heaven. They inspired in me the love of enemies, the holy fear of offending God, the need

(21) French text a literal translation of the Italian autobiography of Messina (1897).

for the right intention, the awareness of my nothingness, self-detachment and the sacrifice of all that is transitory for the pure love of the good God. I must also state that, as I was extremely ignorant, in everything of God and of the Universe, my kind brother was willing to become my teacher. He taught me, corrected me, He often scolded me mildly then encouraged me through trust in the everlasting mercy of God and in the merits of the Passion of Jesus Christ, our sweet Saviour. The apparitions of my beloved Jesus, full of love for His creatures, produced the same effects. The love which my dear Jesus poured into my heart always kept on growing, and the more I reduced myself to nothingness the more there grew in me the desire to suffer for my dearly beloved Jesus on the Cross. It appeared that the more I contemplated the majestic and royal beauty of the kind lover of my heart, the more I sank into the depths of my humility; and I held myself in horror because of the numerous blemishes I discovered on my soul.

After the apparitions (I say apparitions because I saw with my bodily eyes; I do not know if every christian sees in this way), I remained comforted, strengthened, full of trust and good will, for the ever growing love of my Creator, Saviour and Protector, for the ever increasing suffering I was to bear, and for the avoidance of the slightest shadow of sin.

II. I shall now describe the second method by which God communicated with my soul.

While in a state of prayer, with no possible means of foreseeing what would happen, I suddenly found myself (I do not know if my eyes were open or closed) in the presence of my Brother, or of the Virgin Mary—the masterpiece of the Most Holy Trinity—or of Jesus on the cross. The word (uttered without the use of words) which comes from this vision, similar to that of the imaginative communications, seems to stamp itself, as it were, on my soul. And while enlightening it, it kindles there the fire of divine love, it purifies the soul, strips it completely of itself and gently bends the will towards its own. But this isn't much at all. You could say that our will has lost its desires both, negative and positive, that it is fully united with and merged with the will of the supreme good, in such a way that it seems the soul now has the will of God Himself, that it can desire nothing but that which the blessed God desires, that it loves with this will of God, which is constant and unchanging, while—this grace is quite freely granted the soul is sustained by His merciful power.

It seems to me that while in this state, faith is a great source of succour to the soul, to help it wish ardently to lose its own will in order to be fully united with the every wish of God whom it considers most fair and kind. In this state, it is as if the soul were fixed inside God, whom it loves with a burning love, and it sees (without the bodily eyes) the greatness, the beauty, the goodness, the power of this uncreated God, who, unchanging in His essence, is working continuously and performing such miracles in the souls of His creatures. I cannot express the fine touches of the workings of Divine Love in the soul. I

know that this love overpowers the heart, that the union with the divine spouse is complete, that the soul makes its way along with its beloved Jesus in the continual terror of offending Him, of displeasing its Beloved in the slightest possible way. As for itself, it knows its frailty and the depths of its misery, and it is fully convinced that, in itself, it would be totally incapable of doing anything good enough to merit eternal life. And it knows that if it performs an act of love, if it desires love, suffering, martyrdom and a martyr's death, scorn and so on, it knows that all is grace, all is the work of the great mercy of its dear Jesus on the Cross whom it loves with all its heart, with all its strength.

Amen.

III Third State.

In this state, the mercy of our Most Beloved Jesus is communicated to the soul without the use of images. It seems to me it occurs through the medium of the intellect; I do not know exactly and am even less able to express it. This is how I understand and have experienced this phenomenon: the sweet, harmonious, soft, loving powerful and penetrating voice of my beloved Jesus, King of my heart, says to me,

"My sister, may I freely do with you whatever pleases me?" This voice is entirely an inner voice. It is a voice which imprints itself on the soul and leaves in the mind the vivid, powerful, irrevocable conviction that it is the voice of blessed God. And it also seems to me that the voice of the Most High and Supreme God is a working voice, which, by uttering its Word, carries out its admirable task, most gently, in the soul, whose three powers are suddenly lit up in a flash of light. Various effects are produced on the soul by these communications. But always the soul, given a shining light, descends into the depths of its nothingness and sees its total inadequacy in the face of Divine Grace. But it is not disheartened for it is filled with trust in the mercy of its God whom it loves tenderly and greatly, with all its strength.

It may seem that in this state, acts of faith are sufficient. For me this is not so. When I saw I was powerless to respond to so many blessings, I would repeat to myself,

"My cherished Good, I believe you, I believe you, I believe in you; infinite goodness, God of my heart, life of my life, I love you."

One can still perform acts of suffering in return for the offences against His Majesty, and with the hope of obtaining full forgiveness for them through the merits of Jesus Christ. And the soul can see that the Most High God takes great pleasure in this humility of the soul.

More than once, I had given my entire will over to my dear Jesus, just as He too never stopped claiming it back from me in His communications, in such a way that I remained grieved each time; and again I would hand over my will entirely to Him, so that I no longer had any will but His dear will. Then, I saw that the great light which shone into me was enlarging my spirit, that the God of mercy was linking my heart to His heart of fire, and that, by

His secret and irresistible sweet ways, He was drawing my soul to Him, and without force, was bending its free will to the divine call. And I realised that I must hand over my will to Him, not only in obedience to exterior commands; my mind must submit to the conviction that these really were the desires of the Blessed God. The eyes of faith always show, always reveal God in all things, in all happenings, in all the ups and downs on this earth.

In this third state, Divine Mercy is clearly revealed and holds a loving conversation with the soul, teaches it, calls upon it to love more perfectly, more generously, and in better accordance with the truth of pure love.

In these intuitive communications, the soul enters into the closest union with its Most Beloved Supreme Good; and it seems that nothing can detach it.

Reason is completely powerless when such a communication takes place; the heart seems only to want to break out into the open, so violently it beats and jumps about. I cannot say how it happens, but once the soul is completely possessed by my most loving Jesus, it seems to move off across space, to be able to see, to hear the song of Angels, to see into distant lands and to know people's thoughts.

It feels in the bottom of its heart a beloved fear of giving the slightest displeasure to its God.

Thus the senses are captivated and can no longer function, and it is as if the soul were in an agony of intoxication with the divine love in which it finds its only solace. But love, this insatiable love, for its part is not idle. While always making itself better known, it calls on the soul to love more; and gently, without being forced, the soul runs, runs and runs and throws itself into the arms of its loving and beloved Jesus, never ceasing to pray for and desire the consummation of the eternal union, for, knowing its own frailty, it fears with a holy fear, that it might offend and lose its Beloved One.

I would like every man to know the love God has for His creatures, to every man I would like to preach the love of God for His creatures, to every man I would like to describe God's hunger for the salvation of men, and how much, for love of us, the most loving Jesus suffered. But all I say is useless, for it is known that the soul which God in His divine mercy has led into this secret room or rather this furnace of love, has no other desire than to speak of this treasure, discovered after the complete stripping of itself and its active purification.

It is possible that some people, having reached this third state, where the desire to love the divine Master more and more is never satisfied, have no more to suffer. It is not for me, ignorant as I am, to speak of the different degrees of Divine Love, nor of its admirable effects on the soul. It all depends on the faithful response to the appeals and workings of God.

In this third state, composed entirely of love, union and willingness, I felt a great desire to love my God and my sorrow was great for I thought myself to be the only creature to have refused the love due to my Loving Jesus. And more and more ardently I desired suffering, to unite me with my Saviour

Jesus on the Cross. Yet I felt deep in myself that I loved my Jesus and that He loved me. But I became afraid of being deceived, deluded. The first time I saw my loving Jesus again in a mental vision, I made the sign of the Holy Cross and said,

"In the name of Jesus Christ, who died for the human race and was resurrected through his own virtue, run from my presence, for I belong to Him, I am made of nothing but love!"

My Jesus was pleased with my humble fear and said to me,

"Sister of my heart, fear not, I am the life and the truth, and I shall never allow the devil to harm you. In all humility, be faithful to divine appeals; follow my commands strictly." ... I loved ... and the divine and eternal love seemed the only thing in my life, in my being ...

In this state, the revelations are clearer, more convincing, and in one way or another the ways of God are revealed; and although the old serpent of deceit imitates and apes the apparitions of saints, and even of Jesus Christ Himself, he cannot deceive a soul united with Jesus, a humble and fearful soul.

Alone, with no human guide, among the corrupt world and perilous circumstances, my Brother, full of love and mercy, was willing to protect me from danger and freely grant me the gift of knowledge of hearts, of the distinction between good and evil,—that is, of course, when God gave his permission.

I have explained myself as clearly as I could, and it seems to me that that is enough."

Such, literally translated, is this piece of rough copy (as Melanie calls it) which she would have wished to throw in the deepest ocean. The view of the real life of her soul which it reveals, surely sheds light on the meaning of the kiss of Saint Roch. Her inner destiny, as it were, is a closed circuit; all the seeds of her future existence—completely mystical—as a Victim of Crucified Love are contained therein.

This view allows us to approach, and decipher a little more clearly her autobiographies and the reading of the childhood life. Through such insight we can get to know the real Melanie.

HER CHILDHOOD

Before entering upon this account, it is perhaps worth recalling what Melanie wrote in a letter to Fr. Roubaud (20th October 1893) with regard to a copy of her autobiography of 1852, which had been returned to her from Corenc, somewhat "rearranged" by the nuns.

"I do not understand how I possibly can have written some of these things. It makes me blush to the roots of my hair. It is true that at the time I was an open book and *I believed I was like everybody else or that everybody else was like me.*"

Melanie Calvat (Sister Mary of the Cross) was born on 7th November 1831 at Corps, a canton-town in Isère, on the road from Grenoble to Gap. She was christened Françoise-Mélanie on the 8th November 1831.

Coming after three already grown-up boys, she was welcomed with joy. After her, were to be born two more sons and two more daughters. The family was, however, poor. The father, Pierre Calvat, named Mathieu, was a mason. He took what work was going; he only came home on Saturday evenings, and, sometimes, if the site was too far away, he would be a month or even more away from the family. He loved his children and would have wished them to be good Christians. He had a sister who was generally considered "priest-ridden". But because of his job and the habits of his friends, he himself was often kept far away from the Sacraments. As for his wife, Julie Barnaud, she was carefree and gay, and seized every opportunity to go out: to winter evenings at various people's houses; in summer, to meetings, balls and plays put on by passing travelling theatres. So, very soon, she began to resent this young daughter she had wanted so much. As soon as the child was six months old, she would take her along to the shows she so adored, and once the child had seen the crowd around her, she would burst into tears, burying her head in her mother's shoulder and making such a noise they had to leave. This horror of crowds did not lessen as the child grew older. At home she was quite silent and would sit alone in a corner disturbing no-one.

When the father was home, he would have the evening prayers said, and taking little Melanie in his lap, he would teach her how to make the sign of the cross, then placing the crucifix in her hands, he would explain to her how Christ had so wanted to suffer and to die, to open up the gates of paradise to us.

"I liked that a lot", writes Melanie (22). "I loved this Christ, I talked to Him, but He did not reply, and, in my ignorance I thought I should imitate His silence ..." So she did not talk. She did, however, scream, cry and struggle wildly when taken out. She was impossible. If she were left alone in the house and some pauper came along, she would unthinkingly give him anything that came into her hands. She would feel a strange kind of guilt and when she heard her mother say that she would be better dead, a child like that, she agreed with all her heart and would willingly have died to put an end to the torments she could not help but cause her mother.

Once again having to miss a nice show because of her, her mother decided to rename her "Mutta Gaura" in patois (Wild Mute) (23). She forbade her sons to call her their sister, forbade her to call her Mamma, announced that

(22) Italian autobiography.

(23) The patois of the Corps area is a corruption of Provençal. Somehow a migratory group of Provençaliens ended up driven into these lofty valleys of the Dauphiné. And when people of the Corps area leave their homes, they tend naturally to move towards the South. Maximin's sister was in service in Marseilles, where Julie, Melanie's mother was later in Service. She died at Cannet.

she did not belong to the family and had been born to live amongst the animals of the woods like a little she-wolf. At the time she was scarcely three years old.

The humble abode of her parents lay at the end of the village. Behind the next hillside, not far away, was a wood. "Already", she says (24), "a mysterious attraction drew me to the solitude of the wood. As my mother could not see me sitting alone in a corner without saying to me: 'Out of that corner and get out of my sight!'" It was to the wood that I would have wanted the strength to go. But I would fall down not far from the house. In an instant a pretty child of my own age would appear at my side and give me His hand to help me up. I had known Him for a long time, I had seen Him nearly every day since I could remember." But like the 'Mutta Gaura', He did not speak. It was in the wood that He was to utter His first words.

THE WOOD

One evening, driven from the house, she had made her way towards the wood. She was quite dispirited and grieved to have no father, no mother, no brothers, nor anyone who wanted her. Her thoughts turned to the Christ of her father, this Christ with His eyes closed.

"And it occurred to me (25), the Redeemer hasn't seen me, He doesn't know me, how will He know I'm alone? He has never spoken to me, and yet He died for us, with His eyes closed. And I want to love Him, I want to die for Him, I hand my whole self over to Him for ever ... I want to pray, but not out loud like my father had me pray. For Christ, He has his lips closed. And I want to pray with my lips closed." She prays, not knowing at that time, as she says, that we must first ask for the grace without which, of ourselves, we cannot pray at all. And she would say, without the use of words:

"I love you like a friend, I love you like a father good as goodness itself, I want to serve you, my tender and powerful Father; your throne is the cross ..." I meant, she explains, the wooden cross, I could not see any further.

The bright light of day was beginning to recede, the birds had stopped singing, all was silence. She sat down on a felled tree. Again she started to cry at the thought of her parents believing them gone for ever. Then, she saw the crucifix again in her mind ...

"And I started thinking: Christ does not weep, His eyes are closed and He is silent, I love Him, I want to be like Him, I shall cry no more ... (26) And closing her eyes, she falls into a sleep which only ends after dawn.

(24) Autobiography of 1900, in answer to a question of Fr. Combe.

(25) Italian Autobiography.

(26) Italian Autobiography.

THE DREAM

During the night, she had a dream.

It is the answer to her prayer, the acceptance of her vow. She will catch a symbolic glimpse of the image of her whole life, and will start to receive the communications which will shape her soul.

And so she dreams that, weary in body, dejected in spirit, she searches in vain, a resting place. Finally she sees a great tree which had been felled because its large roots, grown criss-cross over each other, have prevented it being rooted up. It looked dead, but a green branch was growing out of its trunk. Sitting on the old tree, leaning her shoulders against the new tree, she was drowsy with fatigue and sorrow. It is then she hears someone call her,

"Sister, my dear Sister, I am your brother, come." She sits up, looks around and sees the beautiful child she knows so well, dressed in pink with white shoes. And this time, He speaks! Enchanted, she wants to kiss Him. He tells her it is not yet the time ... But her pain had ceased, her heart was burning with love; deep and clear is the knowledge poured into her of the Eternal Wisdom and Goodness which, though it takes up no space at all, is nevertheless everywhere. She realises that all real science lies in the knowledge given by the Creator and in the love of the Cross, and that we must love God not for His gifts, not even for the Heaven of Heavens bestowed through His mercy on those who follow Him, but for Himself, with a love that is pure.

Along with these revelations went the view of her own smallness. The smaller she felt, the more the love of her Redeemer grew in her; the more she "melted" into her loneliness, the more her spirit was lit up, warmed, solaced.

But realising she is powerless to respond to so many graces of light, which her beloved brother generously bestows upon her, she longs for suffering. She will explain this later,

"When you sense vividly the presence of God deep in your soul, suffering is a veritable necessity, a hunger, a need to prove to the lover that He is loved ..." (27)

Then her brother takes her by the hand and tells her,

"Where do you want to go?" And she, on the spot, is inspired to answer,

"To Calvary!"

"Very well", He says "but take care not to leave my side, or you will fall."

Then the wood disappears. They find themselves at the foot of a tall mountain and they begin the heroic ascent. The straight path which must be taken to reach the summit safely is littered with stones and thorns, and as they ascend, the stones and thorns get bigger and bigger and more intermingled with crosses. From the sky too there rain down crosses large and

(27) Letter to Fr. Combe, 22nd November 1898.

small. As if buried under these crosses she falls, she cries for help. Her brother comes back down to her and says,

"We are not there yet. If you want to turn back, it will be less painful"

"No," she replied, "no, I want to come with You. I shall make my way up behind You, and where you have put your feet, I shall put mine."

"My dear sister", He replied, "you have found the secret".

And He holds out His sweet and powerful hand to her. But the ascent is hard, the crosses innumerable and heavy. The sky is covered with black clouds, darkness falls. And now she loses her sense of touch, she can no longer feel the hand which draws and supports her. Did she really let go? That would be a disgrace to end all disgrace. Her fear, her agony, are such that she can no longer even feel the stones, thorns and crosses. An immense anxiety dominates everything, and the only thing she remains aware of, in this dark labyrinth, is the consolation of suffering, knowing she has deserved it . . .

However, great crowds of people pass her on another path, wider and easier, laughing and enjoying the sight of her painful progress. They turn on her in derision, insult her, call her stupid, mad, a bigot, a hypocrite. Some are on foot, some in fine carriages. But soon they are all swallowed up in a kind of well which pours out flames and smoke. Horrified, she falls to her knees and offers herself up to the Redeemer, to suffer her whole life through, each and every day, to make reparation for the offences against His hidden glory.

In this act of burning love, she recovers her lost sense of touch, she can again feel the strong, sweet grasp of her Brother's hand. He is there. He did not abandon her. She had not once left His side. Her joy is so great that she wakes up and finds herself alone again, in the wood, in the same place where she had fallen asleep.

The sun was already high. But for her, from that day on, everything, including herself, is bathed in another shining light, more penetrating and constant.

REVELATIONS

How long does this first and decisive initiation into divine life last? How many days does little Melanie remain lost and entranced in the enchanted wood? She has no idea. She knows that during this time were revealed to her the mysteries of uncreated love, of its qualities, its mercies—a remarkable piece of religious instruction without a trace of school room formulae.

At the same time, there is born in her a feeling of the most intimate suffering, seeing and realising that the love of Eternal Love is infinite and that her own love, will always be next to nothing.

How can she respond to this infinite love, but by suffering, by crucifying herself, before the image of the Redeemer? Her first prayer, in thanksgiving for so much light, is a request for the strength to suffer enough to be able,

through the merits of the Redeemer, to love Him in the way He wishes to be loved (28).

As if in response to her supplications, she is granted the revelation of the mystery of the Eucharist.

"The more I saw the perfection of Divine Love, the more I faded away in my own eyes, becoming quite tiny, and if the Most-High had wished to leave me in my nothingness, I would have fallen like a dead leaf blown away and lost in the wind."

But the Most-High takes her from herself.

"The apparition of the 'Altissime' in the form of bread lasted no more than a minute. A soft, glowing, loving moment when the humble heart is consoled, restored, encouraged. I realise that, by myself, I can do nothing to obtain this invigorating love: it takes root in hearts solidly based on the living faith in which pure charity is born, and all this is given by the Blood of the Saviour. While I was thinking of telling my loving and divine Master that I would like Him to pray in me, with me, I saw, in a great flash—(with the eyes of my soul) my sweet and dear Redeemer passing, carrying a large cross, and with a crown of thorns."

THE CROSS

This is her first vision of Jesus crucified. When it fades away, there remains a burning desire to suffer the very agonies of the Passion. Giving herself completely over to sweet Jesus, she begs to be granted the special grace of being associated with the torments of the Crucified One. Her prayer is heard by her Brother who grants her—in bidding her eat a green and violet flower, the symbol of pain and enduring strength—all of the Passion her young body can bear. At the same instant, there is kindled in her the desire to see all men brightly lit with the everlasting light and aware of the Presence of God. As for herself, she has the inner assurance that wherever she goes on the earth, however poor and destitute she may be, she will always remain in this divine presence, in the gaze of its immensity.

THE FIRST COMMUNION

She fed herself on the small wild fruits which grow in woods.

"I must state," she adds (29), "that several times my Brother brought me an exquisite sustenance which restores the strength for several days."

At first these were flowers with a delicious juice. Then one day when she

(28) Italian autobiography.

(29) Italian autobiography.

was on her knees in fear of not having delivered up her whole soul to the devouring divine love, her Brother appeared to her, grown-up and dressed like a priest when celebrating Mass. At first she didn't know what was happening. She found out much later when she attended Mass for the first time. On her brother's breast lay a kind of open heart, with sparkling rays of light springing forth, "peaceful, loving flames". He placed his hand in that burning wound and picked out with two fingers a small snow-white disc, with His portrait on it, but this was a portrait in living flesh, the eyes were moving, the mouth was speaking; and He spoke to her saying,

"Sister of my heart, receive the eternal love of the God of the strong."

She felt invigorated. Her heart leapt in her chest as if it wanted to escape. But, lucidly she defines the act of communion: "The two extremes embraced each other: the extreme, eternal, infinite greatness, and the lowest nothingness."

THE IMPOSITION OF STIGMATA

"What favour does this paltry creature desire?" asks her Brother.

"If it is the will of the everlasting light", she replies, "I wish to serve His glory on the path to Crucifixion."

Then her Brother breathes on her lips, lays his hands on her head, his right hand on her right hand, his left hand on her left hand, touches both her feet and her heart.

"I cannot say more," she says, "Oh what true painful, loving ecstasy, to be alive and dead at the same time! Oh Jesus, make yourself known and loved by all men, Oh that I may love you, O Fire, as You love, and then I will be content."

From this moment onwards, she felt great pain in the parts of her body which had been thus stigmatised, and at certain times, particularly Fridays and during Lent, wounds would form there and open up, bleeding profusely. But the "She-wolf", she says, did not like this blood, for by revealing her mystic state, it went against her humble desire to remain hidden. And then, she says naively, it wasn't clean. So she begs her true Mother, the Holy Virgin, to grant her that the pain remains just as violent, but that the outward signs disappear. These mysterious wounds, however, reopened a number of times, this will be seen later (30). And in solitude, far from any witness, her hands must have bled often. Some of her last letters carry the stains to prove it.

(30) In his diary, Fr. Combe notes that he was indiscreet enough to ask her, or rather order her, in the name of obedience, to bring him the cloth which had staunched the wound in her side. She obeyed. "A great pool of flesh blood!" he says.

FIRST APPARITION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN

The Holy Virgin had become her Mother. "Our Mother", said her dear little Brother from her first communion onward. What joy! The unwanted little girl had a Mother! and what a Mother! She had appeared "as beautiful as a new bride, lovable as the Love of Love, attractive as a lover, fresh as a morning rose (31). And She had told her,

"I will look after you, little daughter, as your Mother and Mistress" and outlining her calling, She advised her to offer herself up, through the merits of Jesus Christ, for the exaltation of the Holy Church, and in particular for the clergy.

From the start, little Melanie has been introduced into the mystery of the co-operation of Mary in the work of the Redemption. She is man's reconciliation with God. She is crowned Queen, in Heaven and on earth. "What Jesus Christ is by nature, His most Holy Mother is by grace." (32)

And, at the same time, she is her Mother for ever and ever. But her little Brother, her beloved Brother who is also a master, does she know He is Jesus Christ?

This question was asked of her by Fr. Combe (33). She replied in writing with the following note:

"Your Reverence wishes to know if I knew that it was the Divine Infant Jesus who came close to me? I must state that my beloved Brother for more than twenty years left me ignorant of whether or not He was Jesus, and that I myself had quite simply believed what He had said, that He was my brother and I was His heart. Therefore, I accepted, His visits without reflection. I must state, to my shame, that it was a great joy to me to have such a good brother to whom I could speak of my dear Jesus. Moreover, I was not in the habit of reflecting on things, and I had no time for it, as, ever since I had known that our Good Lord who takes eternal pleasure in His own glory and who needs no-one, had come to take on a soul and a human body in order to suffer, I was continually deep in thought about this mystery of love, and I had no spare time to think about things which are not necessary to the love of our Good Lord."

The naked simplicity of a love that is true and pure. A great shock to our ways of narrow introspection and subjectivity. This soul, freed from itself, goes straight towards its unique goal: it matters little by which messengers, by which paths, God pleases to make Himself known and loved by his creature, as long as He is known and loved.

(31) Italian autobiography.

(32) Letter to Canon de Brandt, 7th August, 1886.

(33) Autobiography of 1900.

HOME AGAIN

It was now Saturday. "I knew this", she says, "from the inner voice which, in a moment of prayer, told me to go home before my absence caused trouble in the family".

Immediately, she walks out of the wood. It was high time. On the way she meets her father who is looking for her. He hugs her and asks her how long she has been out of the house. "I had no answer to give," she says, "for, in truth, I didn't know how many days or weeks I had been in the wood. He asked me what I had eaten. I told him my brother had brought me some very nice food. My father calmed down, and the family knew peace again."

Sunday, however, lies strangely heavy on her; people's conversations bore her: how can they talk at all without talking of the Good Lord. Despite all their exhortations to be more sociable, she retreats into a corner and says nothing, looking in her mind for a way to do penance, and how to do—as her Brother had taught her—thirty-three genuflexions then fall prostrate with arms in the shape of a cross, or to pray standing up, her hands dangling at her sides like a condemned prisoner.

After a few days, she falls ill. The illness is long and puzzling and the doctor is called. She would never have accepted being touched. For a long time she has been extremely weak, unable to stand on her feet when lifted up, often vomiting and fainting. Her Mother "the Most Holy Virgin" comes and comforts her, gives her patience and courage. She finally gets better. But her unresponsive and serious character asserts itself more fully. Nothing can tame the wild little girl. Silent, yet affectionate and biddable indoors, as soon as she must go out, to a ball or a show, she is intractable.

And so there are scenes, threats, punishments. The poor little girl with a good heart, she feels herself to blame with her mother. Every time she disobeys, she feels stinging regret. But the repentance of each of these faults, deepening her humility, becomes a kind of moral spring-board lifting her fervent soul even higher in inner perfection and purity of love towards a greater inner perfection and purity of love. Every misfortune in her young peasant-girl's life marks, on her mystic ladder, a higher rung, and a new infusion of light.

And so to the story of the twopenny doll and the conjuror . . .

THE TWOPENNY DOLL

To try and get her into the habit of meeting people, her mother would take her to visit neighbours. One day when these women had met to do a little sewing, some of them were dressing dolls. Little Melanie started, from her corner, in admiration of these dolls, which she quite believed to be tiny little children. And she suddenly felt a great urge to have one of her own, who, she

thought, would love the Good Lord, and to whom she could talk about the Good Lord. But how should she go about it? Alone in the house for a moment, she takes two pennies out of the drawer, runs off to buy a doll, and once back in the house, immediately undertakes to teach it "the things of God" and to make it say the most holy names of Jesus and Mary. Walking through the door, her mother is astonished to hear "the little dumb girl" talking and comes to see what she is doing. The little dumb girl says,

"This doll won't say anything. I can't make her say the Holy Name of Jesus. I don't like her" Not taking any notice of this pious nonsense, her mother asks her who gave her the doll.

"No-one gave it to me", the little girl answers innocently, "I bought it with the two pennies I took out of your drawer."

In her anger, her mother takes the doll away from her, scolds her severely, tells her that with all her faults she will end her days in prison! Not content with disobedience, now she practices theft. Without a doubt God is not pleased with her. Melanie asks forgiveness. She promises to pay back the two pennies. Her father, she knows, won't refuse her them. But her conscience is troubled; she has sinned; she would like to pay for her mistake. Yes, she will let them take her to the theatre and won't say a word. She makes a promise. Yet, in her desire for pure fidelity, while praying to God to help her in her resolution, she begs Him to protect her senses, she wishes He would prevent her seeing or hearing anything distasteful to her! Her prayer will be heard.

THE CONJUROR

At the time a conjuror is touring the area. Everyone runs to see him. He announces that he will cut off a man's head and put it back in its place without pain. All eyes are glued to the stage. Melanie's mother is enthralled by the show, and overjoyed to see her little daughter so quiet. But at the very moment when the head is about to be cut off, she says to her,

"Look, oh do look!"

and the child lets out a great scream,

"No! It is not real! My eyes cannot bear to see trickery!" She starts crying so loudly that she has to be taken home.

Incorrigible creature! Her mother turns her out.

IN CHURCH, ABSOLUTION

It was pitch dark outside. This time she couldn't find refuge in the wood. She decided to go to the church where her father had once taken her. The church was still open. Evening Prayer had just finished. There was only one person left, she was making the stations of the cross. It was Melanie's aunt,

her father's sister, the one who was "priest-ridden". The little girl walks straight up to the altar of the Holy Virgin. It was the first time she had prayed in a church and in front of a statue. She gazes towards Her. The statue appears to come to life. Much afflicted by her great sin—the petty theft of two pennies—she prays with all her heart. And then all at once, in a great flash the statue disappears and she find herself in front of the True Mother of Mercy.

The Holy Virgin holds the dear little Brother on her left arm, and He has a shining frame in his hands. But no, it is not a frame, but a mirror of silver. The little Brother looks into it, but He can't see very well because the surface is stained. This mirror of the Divinity, she realises is her soul; the stains are her sins. The stains must be removed for God to rediscover His image and take pleasure in looking at Himself.

"I fell to my knees", she says (34), "and prayed to Mary, Virgin Mother, for the forgiveness of my sins, through the merits of the Passion death of Jesus Christ and through the merits of His poverty. And I prayed to my sweet Jesus to give me his absolution. He did so with his right hand. Then the Holy Virgin made a sign of the cross with her right forefinger over the mirror. It began to shine brightly, and Jesus watched Himself in it with delight."

He makes one more sign of blessing. Everything disappears. She find herself back at the foot of the altar.

Her aunt had seen her. She takes her back to her own house, and to save her from the punishments which await her at home, she keeps her there. Melanie stays there for two or three months. They say their prayers there, and on Sundays, they recite the rosary on their way to Our Lady of Gournier, a little chapel situated in a mountain gorge, half an hour from Corps on the road to La Salette.

But Julie, her mother, is furious when she sees her in the midst of this priest-ridden lot. One Sunday when the little procession passes her door, she can't bear it any more and rushes to grab Melanie and shut her away.

THE SHEPHERDESS

It was the season when the mountain dwellers come down into Corps to hire shepherds. They take them on for around six months—the length of time they can graze their cattle on the high-lying pastures. They send them back down at the first snows. Melanie's mother hurries to hire her out to an old woman to look after her sheep.

"My parents were poor", writes Melanie (35)", but the truth of the matter

(34) Italian autobiography.

(35) Autobiography of 1900.

is that I was more wicked than poor. That is why I was set to work at an early age by my dear Mother.”

She was not yet seven years old. Small for her age, she was more serious-minded than the other children, more taciturn too. In answer to people who asked her name, she would say “Sister”, and soon everybody called her thus. She had only just started school, while at her aunt’s house, and hadn’t even learnt the letters of the alphabet. She spoke and understood nothing but patois. Besides, she found that school lessons were not very “nice” (36). She would not have wanted to do at school what she could have done in Heaven with her “Mother”. And she didn’t like school because there was too much noise. Her little “Brother” had told her,

“What I advise you to do, is to close your heart tightly against all the noise of this world. Do not listen to what the world has to say, do not do what the world does, do not believe what the world believes.” Silence was dear to her. She could remain so for hours on end in the pastures now. And so away she goes, hand in hand with the old woman, as far as a lonely house in the town, where she will see no-one but her mistress and her sheep. Her life of a little shepherd-girl and serving-girl begins. From now on, it is the strict fulfillment of her duties, of at times harsh servitude, of obedience and patient devotion to her masters—even when they are wicked—that the work of grace will be perfected in her. To the gifts which are freely poured upon her, it is up to her to respond with the virtues she has willingly acquired.

Alpine solitude is most suitable for meditation. It is a pleasure for Melanie. There she learns to contemplate Nature, to get to know the animals, the flowers, which in spring and summer, bear witness with their lively colours, in the midst of the greenery, to the generosity of Creation. She who can neither play with others nor in the same way, sometimes plays on her own at building a “paradise”. It is a little house made of mountain stone. The doorway is very wide, for with no door or windows, it only has three sides. On these three sides a flat stone is placed to make the roof. It is covered with flowers and surrounded with garlands. The inside of the house is supposedly where the shepherdess lives, the flowery top represents Paradise.

Sometimes her little Brother comes with her to collect flowers. She marvels at His capacity to always find more beautiful ones than hers. But they are to give to her.

“My sister”, He tells her, “because we are small we can pick them. The grown-ups don’t know how to go about it. You have to be on ground-level ...” (37) The memory of this never left her. Fr. Combe notes in his diary, 8th July 1900, a Sunday,

“It is interesting to watch her as she leaves the presbytery through the kitchen door and walks past the flowers in the rock-garden. At sixty-nine, it’s

(36) Reply to a question Fr. Combe in the autobiography of 1900.

(37) Autobiography of 1900.

still the little shepherd-girl who used to talk to the flowers of the Good Lord. She stops, as if drawn by a magnet towards the rock-garden. Her gaze falls on a flower and she smiles, then touches it most delicately, without picking it. She is visibly praising the Creator of this little miracle. You can see the effort she needs to make to tear her eyes away and carry on her way."

She will make several nostalgic returns to this poor but idyllic existence in the mountain pastures. "How happy I was, looking after my cows, while still unaware that man could offend the Good Lord." (38)

She avoids offending Him and He never leaves her on her own. He teaches her all the things she must know. At the beginning of her duties, she had no conception of property, and, in her zeal to have her flock graze on the most luscious grass, she would have let them go to places where they had no right to be. Her Brother lets her know the boundaries of the fields, of various properties, of nations and peoples. From Him, she gets a clear and unshakeable idea of justice, and, from the most humble things, she rises progressively to the highest and most universal concepts.

The year was 1838. During the first three years (1838, 39, 40), she is placed in one family to look after sheep and in another to care for a young child. She never, however leaves the area (39). In the winter she goes home to her parents.

AT SCHOOL

Her mother sets her the task of collecting wood, and does not send her to school or to catechism. But on return from his work, her father demands that she finally be sent to school. The eldest son, Auguste, takes her in the mornings and brings her home in the evenings.

The parish school mistress, a good and pious lady, takes an affectionate interest in this strange young pupil. One day—with great difficulty for Melanie who does not like people near her and protects herself when touched—she takes on the task of combing the little girl's hair. Her hair, Melanie explains (40), was all entangled, as the blood (from the stigmata on her head, apparently, though she does not say) had stuck together the strands. It needed to be washed, and there was no water in the house. Unable to comb this bushy head of hair into some semblance of order straight away, the school mistress puts it up and pins it on the front of her head.

"What novelty is this, then?" her mother says, seeing her come home from school with her hair in this style. "You're very smart all of a sudden. That was the only fault you still hadn't got, vanity!" And grabbing some scissors, she

(38) Letter to Mr. Schmid, 23rd June, 1896.

(39) Letter to Fr. Combe, 29th April, 1899.

(40) Italian Autobiography.

cuts it all off. The school mistress, the next day, was most displeased, and didn't doubt it was the rebellious child who had trimmed her own hair. The same day, Melanie's father, home from work, comes to the school to see how his daughter is getting on. He bombards her with questions until she finally admits it was Julie who cut her hair.

There are rows at home, between the mother and father. Melanie is the cause of it and is deeply sorry. But all her efforts to help matters only make things worse.

THE SHIRT—BUTTON

On Sunday morning, her father, putting on a clean shirt, notices there is a button missing from the cuff. He is annoyed, grabs another shirt and this one has a button missing on the front! He loses his temper,

"I made a great mistake marrying a woman who only thinks about enjoying herself, doesn't take care of the home, and spends money on trifles . . ." In a moment, Melanie has grabbed the first shirt, sewn on the button and brought it back, thinking she has solved everything. Quite the opposite! Her father turns on her mother,

"'Sister' is a better housewife than Julie. When she's ten, he'll put the house in *her* hands, *she'll* do the laundry, *she* won't go out to dances and plays, *she'll* be thrifty, *she'll* look after the place . . ."

After that, he goes away for another month. Her mother is now jealous and gives a free rein to her temper. Melanie is a hypocrite, a sham, a wicked, "bigoted" girl. It was to make herself look more thoughtful that she sewed on the button. She wants to take her place, to make her die of shame and sorrow. She is a devilish little wretch . . . Melanie, however, keeps her precious silence, and, she says, (41) "Never having lost the divine presence of blessed God, I kissed with my spirit all the words my mother spoke to me." This is an opportunity to further deepen her lowliness and her nothingness. She accepts these troubles with joy. She obeys without a word when forbidden to sleep in her own bed she must sleep underneath her mother's bed.

Soon the spiritual test, more painful, adds to her misery. She wants to meditate but cannot. When she seeks refuge in God, she is beset by strange thoughts. She begins to have doubts. Is she on the wrong path? Where are her prayers and penances now? Is God pleased with them? Despite all her best intentions, she has failed utterly, God is abandoning her . . . She resists these insidious temptations of her imagination. She calls upon her "Mother", sweet Mary, and in her mind, she says (42),

"Leave my path, enemy of the soul. The road which my Divine Master has

(41) Italian autobiography.

(42) Italian autobiography.

followed (the road of abandonment and humiliation) is the right road in life. I wish to make my way along that road and no other. With my God, I will journey across the world and hell to find my rest in God, the centre of my love."

WORKING

Spring had once again come round (1841). Melanie was approaching ten. A woman came down to Corps from the mountains to take on a girl to look after a small child while her mistresses worked in the fields. Her father had just left once again. While he had been at home, Melanie had got back her bed and family life had been calm. Now he was to be away for a long time, her mother seized the opportunity which offered itself to put Melanie into service far away.

The house was in an isolated part of the mountains, two hours walk from Corps. The nearest village is named 'Le Serre', and belongs to the township ('commune') of St-Jean des Vertus (43).

The family consisted of the woman who had brought Melanie, her daughter who was in her early twenties, a boy of around twelve and the small child. The daughter was the mother of the small child ...

When Pierre Calvat returned at the end of the month, he was most upset to learn that his little "sister" had been placed so far away. He went up to see her. They embraced tenderly. Melanie felt a lump in her throat as she saw him leave. She let none of it show, quite "conformed", as she likes to say, to the divine will (44).

With great courage she gives herself completely over to her servant's duties. But she is so naïve, so innocently charitable, that she makes mistakes, which, moreover, win her new lights.

THE THIEVES

One day when she is alone in the house with the baby, a group of masked men arrive and ask for money and food. She has no idea where the money is, but fortunately, there is no lack of food. She shows them how to unhook the sides of bacon which are hanging from the beams of the roof. She is happy seeing them eat their fill. But, on their way out, one of the men sets fire to a bundle of straw and throws it into the child's cot. Quickly, she puts out the fire, but the smoke and the smell of burning make the mistresses come running. How she is rebuked! What! She is left to look after the house and comes to the aid of thieves! That is a great sin ...

(43) Letter to Fr. Combe, 29th April, 1899.

(44) Italian autobiography.

So, has she grievously afflicted her dear Jesus? The very thought tears her heart out. By herself, she is sure, she can do nothing but evil. So had He left her alone?

But now all at once she sees—without seeing—the object of her love. It is really Him, but she dare not look at Him.

“Sister of my heart,” He says, “peace be with you.” And a perfect peace flows over her. God forgives those hearts which are deeply sorry.

No, she has not offended the divine Majesty. Her intentions were the right ones, and what counts, is a steadfast spirit, a right will. There lies the guarantee of the purity which is required to love God. “I realised,” she writes (45), “that purity of spirit is the guardian of purity of body, and that where there is no purity of spirit, there is no real chastity, and the spirit is not pure unless it is, with all its senses, crucified with Jesus . . .”

She is given back trust, courage, the burning desire to suffer, to be stripped of more and more of her self, to be scorned by every man and woman. Her head full of such thoughts, she works silently. Reprimands do not seem to penetrate her. They do, however, but judging them fair, she considers she has nothing to say in response. They even give her pleasure. And silently, she prays for her mistresses . . .

THE VISION OF PURGATORY

It is about this time she has her vision of purgatory.

“One day,” she says (46), “when looking after my mistress’ cows, I was thinking about the infinite mercy of my dear Sovereign Good and I felt a burning desire for the salvation of every soul. I longed to suffer for every sinner so that they might abandon sin and belong to Jesus Christ to love Him only. I do not know how it came to pass; while I was lying prostrate, my face pressed against the ground, I felt a kind of drowsiness, and, in a kind of dream, I saw my guardian angel who told me,

“Sister, come with me, I will make you see the souls who are friends of God and love Him, but cannot take pleasure in possession of Him, as, soiled with sin, they must be purified. But if you are willing to offer up for them, to the Eternal Father, the blood and the Passion of Jesus Christ, they will be cleansed of their sins and united with God.”

Suddenly, we seemed to take flight, then came down again, the earth opened, and we entered a dark underground cavern which appeared to have been dug out of the bowels of the earth. With a third flight we reached the door, if you can call it a door, which opened on to a terrifying scene of all kinds of suffering and torment, a liquid fire mixed with flames, and horrible

(45) Italian autobiography.

(46) Italian autobiography.

agonies of hunger, thirst and unquenched desires. In all this throng, among this great multitude of souls plunged into the most dreadful suffering, I did not see two whose agonies were alike. All these punishments were different, depending on the malice with which the sin had been committed and how much the sinner had been aware of it. I could not suffer such a sight. I prayed, prayed for all those resigned and holy souls, I begged God through the Passion and the death of Jesus Christ to please grant some relief to all these souls and to set seventy-two free, for the love of Mary, Virgin, collaborator in the Redemption of the human race.

"In the same instant I saw the angel of God approaching, carrying a chalice full of the precious blood of the Lamb which takes away the sins of the world. He sprinkled a few drops over the flames which immediately died down, then over the souls awaiting the charity of the prayer of christians to fly off into the bosom of God. And thus they were delivered . . .

"Oh! If only sinners, if only those dedicated to the service of God could conceive, could imagine the terrible agonies, the dreadful devouring flames of divine justice. Each and every uncurbed passion has its own particular torment. I saw a great number of souls their mouths full of a liquid fire which they were drinking. Oh blasphemers of the adorable and holy name of God, of the Holy Sacrament, of Immaculate Mary! Not all the souls were being purged with fire. I saw some who were suffering a lingering torment. All kinds of suffering were to be seen there, all types and natures. I thought to myself: God wishes his attribute of Justice to be glorified. Without a doubt I shall have to come to this dark place to expiate all the stains of my sins. I shall be deprived of contemplating, of glorifying my Beloved Jesus in reparation for my brothers, and in suffering, I can no longer merit . . .

"Did I wake up? No, I came to, and I saw myself in the place where I had been before this translocation, with my cows . . .

"Fully conscious, I kept a living picture of what I had seen and what had been explained to me without a single word being uttered.

"Since then, I strove, with God's help, as much as I could, to avoid ever displeasing my mistresses, to hold my passions under the curb of the Most High God. I wanted to love, but with a true, pure love, my dear Jesus, not for His gifts, not to find comfort, not for the sake of being pious, but because only God is worthy of love, He alone deserves all our love, and He alone wishes to be loved with His own love. And so, since then, I tried every possible means of giving relief to the souls in Purgatory and obtaining their deliverance. In this region, instruments of penance are not known. In my lowly way, I acquired a few small articles for physical penance. As for inner pains, our merciful Jesus took care of these . . ."

These small articles ("cosette" in the Italian text, which the French text follows word for word) were thorns of wild roses and hawthorn, and briar twigs from which she made herself a bed.

Later, when she had gone home for the winter, in order to punish herself

for the torments which she caused her mother (who had falsely accused her of having stolen one of her rings, and when her father found it, there was a row) she had the idea of making herself a belt studded with nails pointing inwards, which she wore for fourteen years (47).

THE DOVE

The months went by. The shepherdess had atoned by her humble devotion for the great sin of helping the thieves, and to her Sunday visitors, her mistress would say,

"This little girl is a saint, no two ways about it. She works and prays constantly, never thinks of enjoying herself, never touches a thing. She is most obedient. More than once she has asked my permission to sleep in the stable, but I never permitted her to do so." She hears these praises, and in her humility, they make her suffer more than scornful remarks.

She has lost her way. "I no longer live a crucified life," she groans (48), "what shall I do? Deprived of the treasure of precious suffering I have no reason left to live". She adds,

"I speak only of the pains my beloved Jesus sent me through my mistresses, for, thanks to divine mercy, my body and soul have never been deprived of the loving suffering of Jesus."

And yet the days lie heavy on her, sad and lingering. But one day when she was looking after the cows on the mountainside, she entered a deep meditation, and she suddenly saw her Brother watching her and smiling. Let her speak for herself (49).

"He seemed to be smiling; under the clothes on His chest, something was stirring and making groaning noises. My good Brother said (without uttering a word),

"The mercy of God be upon you, Sister of my heart." I said, "Amen". My brother, made purely of love, again said,

"The great mercy of God is upon you, with no merit on your part." And in the same moment, with His right hand He took out of His breast a tiny snow-white dove with its beak held open. I hastily told him,

"Oh my brother, she's dying of thirst, help her quickly while she is still alive!" My Brother replied,

"I will let her drink and dress her like a bride." Then He blew three times in the dove's mouth, put a necklace around her neck, plucked five feathers, and healed her wounds with His saliva. Finally, He pulled a seal from His breast and affixed it to the dove's heart, saying to me,

(47) Corroborated in the unedited personal notebook of Mother de Maximy.

(48) Italian autobiography.

(49) Italian autobiography.

"Sister of my heart, are you happy now?"

"Yes, I am happy with all you have done, But I cannot see the Cross."

"The Cross", He told me, "I put the cross within and without. Now I shall put this on as a safeguard." As He spoke, He pulled a number of thorns from His breast, and placed them one by one around the dove. This surprised me, and I said,

"My Love, what are you doing? Is it Your Will that I should yield thorns for the fire?"

"No, my sister. Look carefully."

And He showed me that not only did the thorns not take root, but neither did they even touch or ruffle the fine feathers of the dove ... These thorns protect the dove. There are certain obvious defects which God in His infinite mercy leaves in those He loves to preserve them from all pride.

"I thanked my Brother, He blessed me, and then I came to."

Coming out of this experience, she felt invigorated. She had been given the conviction that her Sovereign Good, the Most High, is unchanging in Himself, and she felt an indescribable joy in the knowledge that her dear Loving Jesus—her passionate lover—is what He is ... (50)

The time had come when the shepherdess should have gone home to her parents for the winter months. Her mistress wished to keep her on. She went down to Corps to make the arrangements with her parents. Her father was at work. In his absence, her mother didn't cause any problems and agreed to what her mistress had asked.

Melanie believes that the Lord bestowed on her the hardships of cold weather. The snow was deep, a biting north wind blew, the roads were invisible now. She had to go and draw water at a place which was fifteen minutes' walk from the house. At the time, matches had not yet reached those depths of the countryside. Well banked up with ashes the night before, the embers in the hearth would keep going till morning. Yet from time to time on the really cold nights, they would go out. And then she had to walk down to the village for a fire-brand. Often the fog was so thick that nothing was visible at all. She lost her way on more than one occasion. One morning, the wind blew out the fire-brand she was bringing back in the mist. She fell to her knees in the snow, called for the help of Divine Mercy, then carried on her way. She was grieving at the thought of her mistress's annoyance when suddenly a raven flew overhead. He came down in a pall of smoke, croaking all the time, and landed at arm's length. He was holding a piece of burning cloth in his beak. She took hold of it, gave thanks to blessed God, and hurried home ...

(50) Italian autobiography: "che Il mio amante Pazzo Gezu sia Coliu che Eglicie.

MAURICE

However biddable she may have been, the little serving-girl confesses to “jealousy” towards herself. That is to say that, in her modesty and concern for absolute purity, she allowed no-one to touch her not even on the hand or the face.

One day, a man came to her mistresses’ house. His name was Maurice. He was quite young. Melanie found herself next to him at table. He looked at her kindly and wanted to take her on his knee. She struggled. He made as though to kiss her and she slapped his face. He let her go and said, “Ah! your ‘saint’ isn’t as peaceable as you think.” She was scolded, she asked forgiveness, but she said to Maurice,

“Don’t you ever kiss me again!” and ran off on her own.

Maurice was the father of the baby of the young mistress. They were not married. From that day on, the young mistress showed much severity towards Melanie.

But Melanie’s only thoughts were for offences to the Redeemer and the penances to be offered in atonement. At that time she saw Him, God made man, affronted, ridiculed, scorned, called fool, false prophet, ambitious. He invited her to follow Him.

“In contemplation,” she says (51), “of my Beloved, my Lover, my Sovereign Good, reduced to this state by our sins, I could not bear to look, and I wanted to wipe clean His fine, sweet, adorable face which man had spat upon. But the loving Jesus, the stealer of hearts, He said to me,

“No, not in this way, sister of my heart.” In that moment my spirit was enlightened, and I realised, (as all Christians realise, better than I do), that the glorified Jesus does not expect us to use a physical cloth to wipe clean His Face of these stains, iniquities and ingritudes of so many souls, so unknowingly dear to Him. He wants love in return for love. To wipe clean His Face, what is needed is expiation, atonement . . . thus, love and repentance.”

And still, she adds later on,

“The pains which I preferred were those my God sent me either directly or through His creatures. And with these ‘small articles’ which I used (by this we must understand objects of self-mortification), I often felt afraid of not doing what was to the taste of my Loving Jesus.”

MAURICE’S CONVERSION

Spring was late that year. The mountain was still covered with snow. The flocks could not be taken out. Melanie was busy either in the house or in the stable.

(51) *Italian autobiography.*

One day, however, her mistress called her over and told her that from now on, every day she would take a meal over to a man who was working in a stone quarry some distance away. She would not have to go onto the site, the man would see her coming and would come out to meet her and take the basket. Above all, if anybody asked her on the way who the food was coming from, she was to say that she didn't know. In the face of this order, despite her usual docility, the child who could not tolerate the slightest artifice, went up in arms, and,

"All at once, without thinking as I usually do, I said, 'No, I could never do that, my good mistress. This tongue of mine will not utter words which are contrary to the truth and will not desecrate the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit with lies. I would rather die!'"

"Ah, you don't know it yet, my little one," said her mistress, "but if you want to live in peace with the world, you will have to lie in all kinds of circumstances. White lies are not sins. It is your duty to conceal from others what happens in your masters' house. I know religion better than you. Now go and take this basket as I told you and come back quickly."

So she sets off, along paths she does not know, having to ask her way from people she meets.

At last, after a three-quarter hour walk uphill, she arrives opposite the quarry. A man comes out and walks over to her—It's Maurice!

She is terrified. She calls for the help of the Most Holy Virgin:

"Mother! my Immaculate Mother! My most pure, most beautiful Mother, save me! I belong completely to you, I am yours ... Jesus, save me and I will be saved! And through the merits of your precious Blood, convert Maurice and save his soul!"

Maurice approaches. He says nothing. He doffs his caps, greets her respectfully, takes the basket and walks back.

In the evening, he comes to the house. Melanie is called to tell them who the lady was, standing close to her when Maurice came to collect the basket. Where on the way did she meet her? Had Melanie spoken to her despite her mistress' orders? Sincerely, Melanie replies that she was alone and had come back alone, that she had seen no-one and had not betrayed her mistresses' secret ...

For a while longer, she continues to take Maurice his meal every day, and every day, she says,

"I spoke a few words to him whose meaning I didn't understand myself, parrot-fashion. And Maurice would weep. Then, one day, he told me he had decided to change his way of life and would marry my mistress's daughter. And so it was. He set everything straight with God and with his neighbour."

AMONG THE WOLVES

The good weather finally arrived. The grass in the meadows was green and

luscious. The cattle were led out to graze. Thus this extraordinary girl says, "I was out of sight of men." But as the summits were still snow-covered, wild animals, wolves, foxes fled the high areas and came down around and about her. They never once attacked her herd. And out of compassion, seeing they were hungry and knowing they did not eat grass, she gave them her bread. At first, a wolf came, then an old fox came and pulled on her dress towards his lair where he dropped one of his babies who was sick at her feet. She caressed it back to health (52). Others came, and then she began to speak to them of God. (53)

"And quite often, when they came, I would lead them in a procession in honour of the God who created them. And I preached to them, reminding them of the primitive life which they led before the Fall of Adam, the first man, when they lived on intimate terms with man, without fear and in peace ..."

Such redeeming innocence in a scene of an earthly Paradise regained ...

A DRAMATIC SCENE

People were talking about the forthcoming marriage of the mistress's daughter to Maurice. The house, however, did not seem to be in a state of perfect calm.

One evening when Melanie was coming home with the cows, her mistress suddenly accused her of having stolen a large sum of money from her—her daughter's dowry! She threatened to have her put in prison if she didn't give back all she had stolen. Melanie made no reply.

"I was not questioned" she says. She knew quite well that she had never touched any money. She even had no idea where it was kept. Inwardly, she gave thanks to the Lord Jesus for her unjust accusation. No, she had not stolen from her mistress, but hadn't she stolen from her Lord the time He gave her to praise Him, glorify Him, and expiate the offences against Him? This injustice was, in fact, justice.

A dramatic scene follows. Melanie is summoned before a gathering of all the family relations including Maurice, and ordered to pay back the missing sum of money. She replied quite simply that she has never taken anything from her mistress. She welcomes gratefully, she adds, the tribulations which the Heavenly Father sends her. As for being thrown in prison, that would be a great joy to her, since, in order to receive forgiveness of her sins, she will be permitted to imitate her Divine Saviour from afar, and to follow Him down the path of His Passion.

"Ah!" says Maurice's fiancée, furious, "you're making up your own

(52) From the hand-written note-book of Mother de Maximy.

(53) Italian autobiography.

religion. Do you believe that God will forgive you if you do not pay back what you have stolen? You are a real bigot my dear, and your miracles are fakes." Miracles? What's this, then? One of the ladies present has heard talk, in fact, of two miracles which 'Sister' is supposed to have performed. Is there any basis to the rumour?

"Not the slightest," her mistress replies. "They are merely natural occurrences. Once, the baby had fallen in the fire, and hearing the screams, his mother rushed to him and pulled him out badly burnt (at least she thought so!). She cried for help and then fainted. 'Sister' arrived on the spot, seized the child, made the sign of the Cross saying,

"Fear not, it is nothing". And when I arrived, I didn't find a trace of burning on the baby. He hadn't been long enough in the fire to do himself any harm. And there's your miracle for you. Another time, I sent 'Sister' down to the village to get bread. She had to wait as the bread hadn't been taken out of the oven yet. While she was waiting, a little girl who had climbed a pear tree to pick some fruit, fell from the tree and broke her ankle—from what people tell me! 'Sister' came up and said,

"Do not cry, it is nothing: Take off the shoe."

"We can't", said the little girl's parents who daren't touch her.

"Let me do it", said 'Sister', "I won't harm her". She took off the shoe, wiped away the blood which hid the wound, put back together the dislocated bones, while making sign of the Cross over the foot. Then she helped the little girl up, who walked off. And all these idiots shouted about a miracle! The only miracle I want from her, the saint, is to give me back my money."

"That's enough of that," says Maurice. "Let us get on with our work and leave this poor girl to hers."

"And I went away", Melanie says (54), "full of consolation and joy."

Since, on following her account, Fr. Combe had been astonished that Melanie seemed to justify her mistress, she gave her reply (55),

"I approved of what my mistress said because she knew that only God performs miracles. And I too have always believed that even the saints in Heaven cannot do this by their virtue, however sublime it may be. It is God, the all-powerful Unique Being who performs miracles, through Himself or through whom He chooses, and if He wished to make use of a burnt straw for this purpose, this piece of ash should never usurp God's right by daring to say "I have performed a miracle." And she explains that while putting out the embers and wiping clean the truly badly burnt child, as while resetting the dislocated ankle, she was praying, and while she acted, was invoking the adorable Name of Jesus and the virtue of His Cross."

Maurice suspected foul play. In effect, after a while, Melanie's mistress apologised to her and explained that she had fabricated the whole story of the

(54) *Italian autobiography.*

(55) Note to Fr. Combe, in the autobiography of 1900.

theft to test Maurice and to see if he would marry her daughter, even without a dowry. Without weakening, Melanie had endured in her habitual state of silence what she calls a “period of great distress and confusion”. Her contemplation had been interrupted. Once again she had seen her beloved Brother pulling out of His breast the little white dove which represented her soul. He had breathed into the eyes of the dove and then said,

“Sister of my heart, now you will see through my eyes”.

From then on, she sees everything as God sees it.

At the end of November, her mistress takes the shepherdess back home to Corps, as had been agreed with her father during his visit. She was, according to their mutual agreement, to have taken her back by February 1843. But her father was away, and her mother didn’t want to make any promises. Surely she thought it would be a long time to keep ‘the she-wolf’ in the house and idle from December to February. For she refused to entrust her with the mending, and would not let her help with any of the housework at all. Happy in her suffering, Melanie “kept the eys of her soul firmly fixed on God” (56) and obedient to inner inspiration, she did novenas to obtain the release of souls from Purgatory.

THE PRIEST RELEASED FROM PURGATORY

At every opportunity to go out of the house, she would go to the church.

“One day,” she writes (57) “as I walked in to the church, I saw at the foot of the Main Altar a priest who seemed to be in an attitude of humble prayer. Out of respect, I stayed at the back of the church. However, I do not know how but somehow I suddenly found myself close up to the altar and near enough to the priest to see that his clothes were all torn and his face sad, yet calm and resigned. And he said to me,

“Forever blessed be the God of justice and infinite mercy. More than thirty years ago I was justly condemned to Purgatory for not having performed in Faith the Sacrifice which extends the mystery of the Redemption, and for not taking the right and proper care of the souls entrusted to me. My release was promised to me for the day when you will hear Mass for me, in atonement for my culpable indifference. Now, I beg you to perform for my soul your habitual thirty-three genuflexions, with the offering up to the Eternal Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, of the merits of His life.” “As you can well imagine,” she continues, “the next day I intended to go to Mass. But my sins were too great, I did not have the opportunity. My mother would not let me out of the house at the time I would have had to go. What could I do? Could I abandon the soul of this holy priest to the horrors of Purgatory? Could I cause

(56) *Italian Autobiography*.

(57) *Italian Autobiography*.

a delay in his entry back into perfect joy, into the perfect love of his God? And disobey, I couldn't.

"During the three days I was forbidden to go to Mass, I did all I could for the deliverance of this soul, offering myself up to suffer for him, in union with my Jesus, for that holy priest was suffering undeservedly. The Lord finally allowed, on the third day, that a second Mass be said at ten o'clock instead of eight o'clock. My mother knew nothing of all this. I obtained her permission to go out and went to hear Mass for the suppliant soul.

"No need to say it again, I did not know how to pray. I contented myself with lying prostrate at the foot of the Cross on the Calvary renewed during the bloodless sacrifice of God made Man, and with meditating on the merits of all His blood spilt for the human race. I had no desire to interfere in the affairs of God like some corrupt object. So I made use of the voice, the mouth, the love of Jesus Christ to make my offering to the Eternal Father. I offered up, one by one, all the virtues practiced by my most loving Jesus in atonement for the tepid love, belated zeal, weak faith, and lukewarm charity of this soul. I offered up the scorn suffered by the Holy of Holies in reparation for the seeking of earthly honours: and so on and so forth I presented the whole life of the divine Restorer and Saviour of the world to God.

"After Mass, I saw the holy priest dressed in new clothes covered with glittering stars. His soul, now beautiful and shining with glory took wing and rose to Heaven."

FAMILY ROWS

At Christmas (1842), her father came home for a fortnight—and a stormy fortnight it was too. Painful arguments began between him and her mother because of Melanie. Her mother had been going around telling people that Melanie had been brought back to Corps by her mistress because she was impossible, that her mistress wanted no more of her. The lady herself had come down to Corps at the time when the father was there. She put all the gossip straight, and asked for her servant-girl back, on the contrary, for the next season. This incident, on top of all he had heard at the houses of relatives and neighbours about how Melanie had been treated by "her dear Mother", roused her father's anger. He was a violent man when roused.

Melanie does not remember the occasion. She was in her corner, busy performing for 'Bambino' (for the baby Jesus) the number/of genuflections and salutations prescribed by her Brother, when, all at once, the frying pan and its contents were thrown on the floor, and her mother, her latest child in her arms, was obliged to flee from the house and seek refuge with relatives. All that Melanie could do was to hide her mother's share of the family meal under her apron and take it to her later.

She was thanked for her concern with a hard slap which laid her out,

unconscious on the floor. Some people stepped in to intervene. Things calmed down. Her mother returned home. Her father went back to work. A month of peace followed.

It is in such circumstances that Melanie, much afflicted by the many troubles her wicked nature has caused, she says (58), says the following prayer:

“My Love, You can see that I can do nothing without You, so take from me that which displeases You. Leave me only that which must keep me from betraying truth and justice. Make me love You and I will love You. Take glory in the destruction of all in me which is not You.”

“Then,” she continues, “in a flash of light, I found myself standing before the Everlasting Throne of God, of His Eternal Power. I saw how the Uncreated Being responds, governs, protects, creates all with His Infinite wisdom while remaining immutable. The more I watched and loved this great God, the more I felt myself carried and drawn towards loving Him, for Himself alone, as the beginning and end of all my affection, all my love. The immensity of God comforted me in all things, and the knowledge of this immensity was a delight to me. It alone is completely and utterly independent. Man, with his reason, is mad, raving mad, not to love this infinite Sovereign Good, not to submit entirely to Him who promises His vast Paradise and the enjoyment of His true and divine Majesty.”

BACK TO THE MOUNTAINS

After a month's absence, Melanie's father had come home for a few days, and had brought her his shirts for mending. But when he had left again, her mother took the shirts, needles and thread away from her.

Was it a man's business to entrust a mad little girl with mending? She must have turned his head with her 'bigotry'! She would rapidly find a way to get rid of her by putting her back in service, with masters who would take charge of her training. And, without awaiting the return of the mistress from Serre, who expected to take Melanie back, she was hired to the first person to come to Corps looking for a shepherdess.

This was a woman from the village of Sainte-Luce. There would be sheep and cows to watch over. The family consisted of the father, mother and two young grown-up daughters. It was a Christian family; they said their evening prayers together every day. Except for the aches and pains from her work, the shepherdess did not have to suffer there. So she mentions little of the two 'seasons'* (1843 and 1844) she worked there.

The winter was about over when she arrived at Sainte-Luce. There were

(58) Italian autobiography.

*ie. the non-winter months (Feb.-Nov.) when the animals are put out to graze.

still wolves prowling around the herds, so the shepherds grazed their animals in groups lower down the mountain. They asked Melanie to join them, but she had not yet got to know her herd and was afraid they might mix in with other strange herds. She was fond of the isolation of the heights anyway. She went up to just under the snow-line and brought her flock to a halt at the edge of a wood. From there she could hear, during the day, the others calling and whistling, shouting and crying. Then she saw a wolf carry off a young lamb. The other flocks had been attacked. She brought her full flock home to her new mistresses, safe and sound. But she did buy, with a penny she found in the grass, a painted wooden whistle which she always carried. Her little Brother sometimes came to play on it.

At this point, the Italian autobiography comes to an end, still unfinished when she left Messina. As she had written it for Canon Annibale di Francia, the founder of an institution, the pastor and guardian of a large society of nuns and orphans, she adds, however,

"In the meadows, the wolf fixes the shepherd; then, with his eye still on him, he stalks about the herd, waiting for a moment's relaxation by the shepherd, and then he's off with a lamb."

THE GOOD YEAR

In 1845, Melanie was taken on as a shepherdess first at the hamlet of Saint-Michel, then at Quet-en-Beaumont. It is this year (immediately preceding that of the apparition), which she names the year of grace, or the 'good year'.

She, who sought the Cross with such ardour, found privation and ill-treatment to her heart's desire. There was no need to devise her own ways to do penance. God, she says (59), in His mercy, took care of that Himself.

When she came to Saint-Michel, Melanie was going on fourteen. The family which she worked for consisted of the husband, his wife and their young child aged two or three. There was only one bed ... They expected Melanie to sleep with them there. She refused, and, (60) "I knelt down again and continued praying. My masters were insistent. At times, I felt overwhelmed by their arguments because of the trouble I was causing them. I was quite willing, believe it or not, to sleep with them, but, despite it all was firmly resolved to die rather than obey them." It was the same on the second and third nights. Entreated, tempted, ready to drop, she battles on victoriously. She knows from the lessons of her Brother, that for the love of God, certain saints endured, standing up, the deprivation of sleep, and pricked themselves with needles to keep awake. And so she too will persevere. Finally, the fourth

(59) Autobiography of 1900, written at the request of Father Combe.

(60) Dates given by Melanie in a letter to Fr. Combe, 29th April 1899.

night, she had a bed to herself, at the foot of her masters' bed. It was a pig's trough, much too short to lie at full length in, filled with a bundle of dry thistles. There she slept happily, half undressed.

Another child from Corps was working in the same village. Having a day off, he went to see in the early morning if Melanie could go down with him to see their respective parents. Melanie's masters refused to let her go. They were all still in bed. Amazed at what he had seen, the boy described Melanie's bed to the people at Corps. Four or five days later, she was informed that her mother was ill and she must leave her masters and return home.

At home she found her mother in perfect health. The day was Sunday. The following Thursday another family was found for her, at Quet-en-Beaumont, and the Sunday after that, her new mistress came to collect her.

"Glory be to the mercy of the God of Love," she says, "I lost nothing on the exchange." The Le Moine family, of Quet-en-Beaumont, consisted of the old father, the mother and two grown children, a boy and girl, both in their early twenties. It was a family of real brigands, well known by the police, who lived on what they could steal rather than on work. The old man swore the whole day long, at every turn, either about God or religion, and was just as bad-tempered as his cows. These 'nasty' cows, as Melanie innocently calls them, were in fact bulls, of which there were two, with another cow, and a few goats. The difficulty, and the danger, lay in tying up and untying the bulls. The first morning, the daughter of the house went to the stable to untie the animals. Then she armed Melanie with a stout stick and sent her to graze them on the common. All the day long, the little shepherd-girl trembled in fear of having to tie them up that evening. "But," she says, (61) reminding myself of the teaching of my dear, beloved Brother, that Man, before the Fall, was master of the beasts, king of all creation, and the most savage beasts obeyed him naturally, I told myself,

"'Since my most loving Jesus has baptised me a child of God, and with his Blood has cleansed my sins, I am therefore able, in the name of the merits of this Blood, to order my cows to stay quiet when I tie them up or untie them.' Once in the stable, I tied them up without any trouble at all."

Her fight was not against the animals. Here again, it is a fight to sleep in her own bed, which she must carry through to victory.

There are only two beds, one for the mother and father, the other for the son and daughter together. Melanie is offered a place in the second. She is not a large girl and it is a big bed. She refuses. She is ordered. She resists. And this time, she is dealing with ruffians. As if insane with rage, the father drags her by the hair, banging her head on the floor. He screams for his axe, to cut off her head, he says. Summoning all her courage, she repeats, "No! I will not sleep in the same bed as your children." Then, awaiting her end, she proclaims her faith. In a great flash of light, everything around her disappears.

(61) Autobiography of 1900.

Abuse is replaced by delightful music. One by one, virgins in glittering apparel bring her mysterious flowers. She does not feel worthy to accept them. She gives them to the Most Holy Virgin, her Sovereign Lady, her custodian and the guardian of her treasure, who accepts them with a smile and covers this bouquet of heroic virtues with Her veil. Jesus is there. He turns towards her His penetrating, sweet gaze. He is holding a palm branch. By this sign, she realises that although she has not suffered the agony to the very end, her sacrifice has been acknowledged. She wakes up on the floor next to a broken chair. Her masters are arguing, asking each other how on earth she can have got out of the house and then come back in when everything is locked up. The old man shouts that this youngster will drive him crazy. Some of her hair has been torn out, her eyelids are blocked up with dried blood. She walks out silently to find some water to wash herself. Where is it? An inner voice tells her to turn right behind the house. There, a small channel brings fresh water from a spring to the drinking trough. She washes there and then goes off for the whole day with her troublesome herd.

After a few days, as the son had gone away and the daughter, on whom Melanie's bearing has made an impression, had divided the bed down the middle with a plank, Melanie agrees to sleep in the bed, if with repugnance. But when the harvest time came, and everyone was piled into a hut in the middle of the field to sleep, she went to lie down alone under the stars. She was given the job of gleaning. But when she had picked up all the ears in their own field, her masters ordered her to glean in other people's fields, and even to take from the sheaves.

She replies firmly that she cannot steal the goods of her neighbour. They hurl insults at her which she doesn't understand and she walks away. Her master throws stones at her and one hits her in the mouth and breaks two teeth, another hits her head and she falls down unconscious. For food, all she has is a little mouldy bread. The local people who know the Le Moire family, and are well aware that usually the young shepherds they take on leave after a day, take pity on her, let her pick fruit in their orchards, and they try to protect her against violence. But one evening, she returns from the pastures to find the house locked up. Her masters have gone out "for a night's pilfering", a neighbour explains. It is raining heavily. For fear of the bulls she dare not sleep in the stable, so she takes refuge at the top of the outside stairs. Her clothes are soaked. The kindly neighbour comes to get her and lets her sleep in her house. Her masters' nightly escapades occur on several other occasions. Meanwhile, the poor little shepherd-girl is covered with boils and abscesses. Is it smallpox? The village gets excited, her parents are informed. She is taken back to Corps and her younger (by two years) brother Henri comes to replace her.

But she cannot bear to be away from her brutal slavery and after two days she tells her mother she is feeling better and begs to be allowed to go back to Quet. "The masters are away, Henri doesn't know the pasture lands, he'll be

bored . . . Her mother willingly grants her permission. "I took some provisions for Henri," says Melanie (62), "and ran the whole way up." The Masters had not yet reappeared. They are late back and she feels very alone.

Her little Brother no longer pays her any visits. Perhaps, she tells herself innocently, these wicked cows frighten Him. She is dying of hunger. She tries to sustain herself with nuts she picks up on the roadside. But she weakens, and then faints, lying helplessly on the grass. An unknown passer-by, who appears to be going to collect fire-wood on the mountain, brings her three small, white round, soft loaves, marked with a cross, which bear a strange resemblance to altar bread. Comforted by this miraculous food, she gives thanks to Providence, but she immediately regrets having "missed her mark!"

"Ah! I thought (63)," I let it slip! In atonement for the abuse, the injustice done to my most good, most lovable Jesus Christ, I had accepted with all my heart any abasement possible. I would have liked, desired to be destroyed, so that He might be loved, glorified, served by all mankind." To this, a sweet and penetrating voice from the midst of the great light answers,

"What you wished to do is taken as done in the eyes of the Uncreated Being. You have emptied your heart of impurity, God has made it fit for Himself." After this mental communication, I concentrated on my nothingness. My understanding had gone far beyond the words I had heard . . ."

The following Sunday, her father, back at Corps, having learnt from Henri and people from Quet what was happening, let her know that he wished her to return before All Saints', the last day of the hiring agreement.

Her masters had to let her go. When she arrived at Corps, her father was about to go away again to work. But he made it clear that he did not wish her to go back to the Le Moire family, nor to be put back in service elsewhere.

The 'good year' was over.

AT CATECHISM

At irregular intervals, in between her various jobs, Melanie had gone to catechism. Yet, being illiterate, she could not learn her lessons, and could not reply when the curate asked her questions. Often, too, when it was time to go to catechism, her mother would call her and send her to collect tinderwood for the fire. Checking the attendance one day, the curate said to Henri Calvat who attended catechism regularly,

"Your sister doesn't come. Why not? She won't be taking her First Communion this year, yet she's nearly fifteen . . ."

Melanie is sorely grieved and saddened not to be taking First Communion that year. She has heard the Voice of the Light which told her,

(62) Autobiography of 1900.

(63) Autobiography of 1900.

"Respond faithfully and pray." She prays continually, she prays for all mankind, and whether collecting tinderwood in the snow or on her knees in the church in penance for arriving late at catechism, she rests, a tiny little girl totally abandoned, in the hands of Him who directs everything for our greatest good, under the watchful eye of the Most High.

At this time during the first days of spring, (1846) there comes the walk to the chapel of St. Roch, already mentioned above. There Melanie receives, as we recall, the mystic kiss from her Brother, the sign and seal of her union with her Divine Husband.

On the surface, she is still the same strange and wild little girl whose reticent character her mother cannot bear. And so, as soon as the opportunity arises, she is hired for the season to some people from Ablandins, a remote hamlet deep in the mountains, close to the 'commune' of La Salette. Once again she leaves her home, her parents and Providence leads her to a place no doubt chosen by It for the Apparition. We can see it now, everything is focused on the Miraculous Message, and the messenger is ready . . .

PART TWO

A MISSION PUT TO THE TEST

THE APPARITION

Only the witness herself, Melanie, can, along with Maximin, give an account of the apparition. After giving it by word of mouth an incalculable number of times, she decided to write it all down in 1878. It was published at Lecce on the 15th November 1879—with the “imprimatur” of Bishop Zola—and reprinted “ne varietur” at Lyons in 1904, a few months before Melanie’s death. This slim booklet is now a rarity.

The text is followed exactly here.

“On the 18th September (1846), the eve of the Holy Apparition of the Holy Virgin, I was alone, as usual, watching over my Masters’ cows. Around eleven o’clock in the morning, I saw a small boy walking towards me. I took fright at this, for it seemed to me that everyone ought to know that I avoided company of all kinds. This boy came up to me and said,

“‘Little girl, I’m coming with you, I’m from Corps, too.’”

At these words, my unpleasant nature soon showed itself, and taking a few steps back, I told him,

“I don’t want anybody around. I want to be alone.”

But this boy followed me, saying,

“‘Go on, let me stay with you. My Master told me to come and watch over my cows together with yours. I’m from Corps.’”

“I walked away from him, gesturing to him that I didn’t want anybody around, and when I was some distance away, I sat down on the grass. There, I used to talk with the little flowers of the Good Lord.

“A moment later, I look behind me, and there I find Maximin sitting close to me. Straightaway he says to me,

“Keep me with you, I’ll be very good.”

“But my natural evil will not hear reason. I jump to my feet and run a little farther off without saying anything, and again I start playing with the little flowers of the Good Lord. In an instant, Maximin was there again, telling me he would be very good, that he wouldn’t talk, that he would get bored all by himself, and that his Master had sent him to be with me etc. This time, I took pity, I gestured to him to sit down, and I kept on playing with the little flowers of the Good Lord.

“It wasn’t long before Maximin broke the silence by bursting into laughter (I think he was making fun of me). I look at him and he says to me,

“‘Let’s have some fun, let’s make up a game.’”

"I said nothing in reply, for I was so ignorant I didn't understand what games with other people were, always having been alone. I played with the flowers, on my own, and Maximin came right up close to me, doing nothing but laughing, telling me that flowers didn't have ears to listen to me and that we should play together instead. But I had no liking for the game he told me to play. I started talking to him, however, and he told me that the ten days he was to spend with his master would soon be over and then he would go home to his father in Corps etc . . .

"While he was talking, I heard the bell of La Salette, it was the Angelus. I gestured to Maximin to lift his soul up to God. He took off his hat and was silent for a moment. Then I said,

"'Do you want to have dinner?'"

"'Yes,'" he replied, "Let's start.'"

"We sat down and I brought out of my bag the provisions my Masters had given me. As was my habit, before breaking into my little round loaf, I made a cross with the point of my knife in the bread, and a little hole in the middle, saying,

"'If the devil's in there, may he leave, and if the Good Lord is in there may He stay!'" and I rapidly covered up the hole. Maximin burst into laughter and kicked the loaf out of my hands. It rolled down the mountainside and was lost from sight. I had another piece of bread which we shared. Afterwards we played a game. Then, realising that Maximin must be hungry still, I pointed out a place on the mountainside covered with all kinds of berries. I urged him to go and eat some and he went straight away. He ate a few berries and brought his hat back full of them. In the evening we walked back down the mountain together and promised to come back the next day and watch over our cows together.

"The next day, the 19th September, I met Maximin on the way up. We climbed up the mountainside together. I discovered that Maximin was a very good, simple boy, and would willingly talk about what I wanted to talk about. He was also very flexible and had no fixed opinions. He was just a little curious, for, when I walked off away from him, as soon as he saw I had stopped, he would run over to me to see what I was doing and hear what I was saying to the flowers of the Good Lord. And if he arrived too late, he would ask me what I had said.

"Maximin told me to teach him a game. It was already late morning. I told him to gather some flowers for the "Paradise". We set to work together. Soon we had a number of flowers of various colours. I could hear the village Angelus ringing, for the weather was fine and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. Having told the Good Lord what we had learnt, I said to Maximin that we ought to drive our cows on to a small plateau near the gully, where there would be stones to build the "Paradise" with. We drove our cows to the selected spot and then had our small meal. Then we started collecting stones to build our little house, which comprised a so-called ground-floor which was

where we were to live, and then a storey above which was to be, as we called it, the "Paradise".

"This storey was decorated all over with different-coloured flowers, with garlands hanging from flowers stalks. This "Paradise" was covered by a single large stone which we had strewn with flowers. We had also hung garlands all the way round. When we had finished, we sat and looked at the "Paradise". We began to feel sleepily and having moved a couple of feet away, we went to sleep on the grass.

"When I woke up I couldn't see the cows, so I called Maximin and climbed up the little mound. From there I could see our cows lying peacefully and I was on my way down, with Maximin on his way up, when all at once I saw a beautiful light shining more brightly than the sun and I could have only just managed to utter,

"Maximin, do you see, over there? Oh! my God!" At the same moment I dropped the stick I was holding. Something inconceivably delicious passed through me in that moment, and I felt myself being drawn, I felt a great respect, full of love, and my heart would have wished to run faster than myself.

"I kept my eyes firmly fixed on this light, which was motionless, and as if it had opened up, I caught sight of another, much more brilliant light which was moving, and in this light I saw a most beautiful lady sitting on top of our Paradise, with her head in her hands.

"This beautiful Lady stood up, She partially crossed Her arms while watching us, and said to us,

"*Come, my children, fear not, I am here to PROCLAIM TO YOU SOME GREAT NEWS*" These soft and sweet words made me steal close to Her, and my heart would have wished to attach itself to Her forever.

"When I was up close to the Beautiful Lady, in front of Her to Her right, She began to speak, and from Her beautiful eyes tears also started to flow:

"*If My people do not wish to submit themselves, I am forced to let go of the hand of My Son. It is so heavy and weighs Me down so much I can no longer keep hold of it.*

"*All the time I have suffered for the rest of you! If I do not wish My Son to abandon you, I must take it upon Myself to pray for this continually. And the rest of you, you think little of this. In vain you will pray, in vain you will act, you will never be able to make up for the troubles I have taken for the rest of you.*

"*I gave you six days for work, I kept the seventh for Myself, and no-one wishes to grant it Me. This is what weighs down so much the arm of My Son.*

"*Those who drive carts cannot speak without putting the Name of My Son in the middle.*

"*These are the two things which weigh down so much the arm of My Son. If the harvest is spoiled, it is only because of the rest of you. I made you see this last year with the potatoes, you took little account of this. It was on the*

contrary when you found bad potatoes, you swore oaths, and you included the Name of My Son. They will continue to go bad, at Christmas there will be none left.'"

"At this point I was trying to interpret the word "potatoes" (pommes de terre); I thought I understood it to be "apples" (pommes) (1). The Beautiful and Good Lady, reading my thoughts, repeated thus:

"You do not understand, My children. I will tell it to you another way."
(This text is translated from the original translation into French.)

"If the harvest is spoiled, it matters not, except to the rest of you. I made you see this last year with the potatoes. You took little account of this. It was quite the opposite when you found bad potatoes, you swore oaths, and you included the Name of My Son. They will continue to go bad and at Christmas, there will be none left."

"If you have corn, you must not sow it."

"The beasts will eat all that you sow. And all that grows will fall to dust when you thresh it. A great famine will come. Before the famine comes, children under the age of seven will begin to tremble and will die in the arms of those who hold them. The others will do penance through hunger. The nuts will go bad, the grapes will become rotten.'"

"At this point the Beautiful Lady, who was entrancing me, did not permit me to hear Her for a moment. I could see, however, that She was continuing, as if speaking, to move graciously Her kindly lips. At this moment, Maximin was receiving his secret. Then, turning to me, the Most Holy Virgin spoke to me and gave me a secret in French. Here is the secret in its entirety as she gave it to me:

"Melanie, what I am about to tell you now will not always be a secret. You may make it public in 1858."

"The priests, ministers of my Son, the priests, by their wicked lives, by their irreverence and their impiety in the celebration of the holy mysteries, by their love of money, their love of honours and pleasures, the priests have become cess-pools of impurity. Yes, the priests are asking for vengeance, and vengeance is hanging over their heads. Woe to the priests and to those dedicated to God who by their infidelity and their wicked lives are crucifying My Son again! The sins of those consecrated to God cry out towards Heaven and call for vengeance, and now vengeance is at their door, for there is no-one left to beg mercy and forgiveness for the people. There are no more generous souls, there is no-one left worthy of offering a spotless sacrifice to the Eternal on behalf of the world."

"God will strike in an unprecedented way."

"Woe to the inhabitants of the earth! God will exhaust His wrath upon them, and no-one will be able to escape so many afflictions together."

(1) Neither Melanie nor Maximin understood French. The beautiful Lady now continues her speech in "patois".

“The chiefs, the leaders of the people of God have neglected prayer and penance, and the devil has bedimmed their intelligence. They have become wandering stars which the old devil will drag along with his tail to make them perish. God will allow the old serpent to cause divisions among those who reign, in every society and in every family. Physical and moral agonies will be suffered. God will abandon mankind to itself and will send punishments which will follow one after the other for more than thirty-five years.

“The society of men is on the eve of the most terrible scourges and the gravest events. Mankind must expect to be ruled with an iron rod and to drink from the chalice of the wrath of God.

“May the vicar of my Son, Pope Pius IX never leave Rome again after 1859; may he, however, be steadfast and noble, may he fight with the weapons of faith and love. I will be at his side. May he be on his guard against Napoleon; he is two-faced, and when he wishes to make himself Pope as well as Emperor, soon God will draw back from him. He is the eagle who, always wanting to rise higher, will fall on the sword he wished to use to force his people to be raised up.

“Italy will be punished for her ambition in wanting to shake off the yoke of the Lord of Lords. And so she will be left to fight a war; blood will flow on all sides. Churches will be locked up or desecrated. Priests and religious orders will be hunted down, and made to die a cruel death. Several will abandon the Faith and a great number of priests and members of religious orders will break away from the true religion; among these people there will even be bishops.

“May the Pope guard against the performers of miracles. For the time has come when the most astonishing wonders will take place on the earth and in the air.

“In the year 1864, Lucifer together with a large number of demons will be unloosed from hell; they will put an end to faith little by little, even in those dedicated to God. They will blind them in such a way, that, unless they are blessed with a special grace, these people will take on the spirit of these angels of hell; several religious institutions will lose all faith and will lose many souls.

“Evil books will be abundant on earth, and the spirits of darkness will spread everywhere a universal slackening in all that concerns the service of God. They will have great power over Nature: there will be churches built to serve these spirits. People will be transported from one place to another by these evil spirits, even priests, for they will not have been guided by the good spirit of the Gospel which is a spirit of humility, charity and zeal for the glory of God. On occasions, the dead and the righteous will be brought back to life.

(“That is to say that these dead will take on the form of righteous souls which had lived on earth, in order to lead men further astray; these so-called resurrected dead, who will be nothing but the devil in this form, will preach

another Gospel contrary to that of the true Christ Jesus, denying the existence of Heaven; that is also to say, the souls of the damned. All these souls will appear as if united with their bodies"). (2)

"In all places there will be extraordinary wonders, because true faith has died and a false light shines on the world. Woe to the Princes of the Church whose only occupation will be to heap wealth upon more wealth, and to preserve their authority and proud domination!

"The vicar of my Son will have much to suffer, as, for a time, the Church will be the victim of great persecution: this will be the time of darkness. The church will suffer a terrible crisis.

"As the holy Faith of God is forgotten, every individual will wish to be his own guide and be superior to his fellow-men. Civil and ecclesiastical authority will be abolished. All order and all justice will be trampled underfoot. Nothing will be seen but murder, hatred, jealousy, falsehood and discord without love for the mother country or for the family.

"The Holy Father will suffer greatly. I will be by His side to the end in order to receive his sacrifice. The wicked will make several attempts on His life, but they cannot harm Him. But neither he nor his successor will live to see the triumph of the Church of God.

"All the civil governments will have one and the same plan, which will be to abolish and do away with every religious principle, to make way for materialism, atheism, spiritualism and vice of all kinds.

"In the year 1865, there will be desecration of holy places. In convents, the flowers of the Church will decompose and the devil will make himself like the King of all hearts. May those in charge of religious communities be on their guard against the people they must receive, for the devil will resort to all his evil tricks to introduce sinners into religious orders, for disorder and the love of carnal pleasures will be spread all over the earth.

"France, Italy, Spain and England will be at war. Blood will flow in the streets. Frenchman will fight Frenchman, Italian will fight Italian. A general

(2) In a letter to Father Combe, dated the 7th October 1899, Melanie corrects these words in parentheses which are her own—she says, and which she judges to be unclear and inaccurate. "That is to say," she writes, "that in those days, which only seem like twenty years ago, some perverted people (Italian malvages) had given themselves over to devotion to the demon of magic. These people would cause to appear in the eyes of the curious, acquaintances of theirs who had not led a Christian way of life.

These supposedly resurrected individuals appeared in heavenly glory. People known to have lived in the fear of God appeared to be in horrible suffering, and urged their friends and acquaintances not to follow in their footsteps, and they preached a Gospel opposed to that of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It seems that these bizarre occurrences may be put down to the fashion for spiritualistic evocations and for certain spiritualistic and demoniac practices which no doubt will one day be brought to light through a thorough examination of the Luciferian archives of Free-Masonry."

In the same letter, Melanie takes care to explain that where it is said that people will be transported from one place to another, it must be understood to be in rare cases only.

war will follow which will be appalling. For a time, God will cease to remember France and Italy because the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been forgotten. The wicked will make use of all their evil ways. Men will kill each other, massacre each other even in their homes.

“At the first blow of His thundering sword, the mountains and all Nature will tremble in terror, for the disorders and crimes of men have pierced the vault of the heavens. Paris will burn and Marseilles will be engulfed. Several cities will be shaken down and swallowed up by earthquakes. People will believe that all is lost. Nothing will be seen but murder, nothing will be heard but the clash of arms and blasphemy.

“The righteous will suffer greatly. Their prayers, their penances and their tears will rise up to Heaven and all of God’s people will beg for forgiveness and mercy and will plead for My help and intercession. And then Jesus Christ, in an act of His justice and His great mercy will command His Angels to have all His enemies put to death. Suddenly, the persecutors of the Church of Jesus Christ and all those given over to sin will perish and the earth will become desert-like. And then peace will be made, and man will be reconciled with God. Jesus Christ will be served, worshipped and glorified. Charity will flourish everywhere. The new kings will be the right arm of the Holy Church, which will be strong, humble, pious in its poor but fervent imitation of the virtues of Jesus Christ. The Gospel will be preached everywhere and mankind will make great progress in its Faith, for there will be unity among the workers of Jesus Christ and man will live in fear of God.

“This peace among men will be short-lived. Twenty-five years of plentiful harvest will make them forget that the sins of men are the cause of all the troubles on this earth.

“A forerunner of the Antichrist, with his troops gathered from several nations, will fight against the true Christ, the only Saviour of the world. He will shed much blood and will want to annihilate the worship of God to make himself be looked upon as a God.

“The earth will be struck by calamities of all kinds (in addition to plague and famine which will be wide-spread). There will be a series of wars until the last war, which will then be fought by the ten kings of the Antichrist, all of whom will have one and the same plan and will be the only rulers of the world. Before this comes to pass, there will be a kind of false peace in the world. People will think of nothing but amusement. The wicked will give themselves over to all kinds of sin. But the children of the Holy Church, the children of the Faith, my true followers, they will grow in their love for God and in all the virtues most precious to Me. Blessed are the souls humbly guided by the Holy Spirit! I shall fight at their side until they reach a fullness of years.

“Nature is asking for vengeance because of man, and she trembles with dread at what must happen to the earth stained with crime. Tremble, earth, and you who proclaim yourselves as serving Jesus Christ and who, on the

inside only adore yourselves, tremble, for God will hand you over to His enemy, because the holy places are in a state of corruption. Many convents are no longer houses of God, but the grazing-grounds of Asmodeus and his like. It will be during this time that the Antichrist will be born of a Hebrew nun, a false virgin who will communicate with the old serpent, the master of impurity, his father will be a Bishop. At birth he will spew out blasphemy; he will have teeth, in a word, he will be the devil incarnate. He will scream horribly, he will perform wonders, he will feed on nothing but impurity. He will have brothers who, although not devils incarnate like him, will be children of evil. At the age of twelve they will draw attention to themselves by the gallant victories they will have won; soon they will each lead armies, aided by the legions of hell.

“The seasons will be altered, the earth will produce nothing but bad fruit, the stars will lose their regular motion, the moon will reflect only a faint reddish glow. Water and fire will give the earth’s globe convulsions and terrible earthquakes which will swallow up mountains, cities, etc . . .

“Rome will lose the Faith and become the seat of the Antichrist.

“The demons of the air together with the Antichrist will perform great wonders on earth and in the atmosphere, and men will become more and more perverted. God will take care of His faithful servants and men of good will. The Gospel will be preached everywhere, and all peoples of all nations will get to know the truth.

“I make an urgent appeal to the earth. I call on the true disciples of the living God who reigns in Heaven; I call on the true followers of Christ made man, the only true Saviour of men; I call on My children, the true faithful, those who have given themselves to Me so that I may lead them to My Divine Son, those whom I carry in My arms, so to speak, those who have lived according to My spirit. Finally I call on the Apostles of the Last Days, the faithful disciples of Jesus Christ who have lived in scorn for the world and for themselves, in poverty and in humility, in scorn and in silence, in prayer and in mortification, in chastity and in union with God, in suffering and unknown to the world. It is time they came out and filled the world with light. Go and reveal yourselves as My cherished children. I am at your side and within you, provided that your faith is the light which shines upon you in these unhappy days. May your zeal make you hunger for the glory and the honour of Jesus Christ. Fight, children of light, you, the few who can see. For now is the time of all times, the end of all ends.

“The Church will be in eclipse, the world will be in dismay. But now Enoch and Elias will come, filled with the Spirit of God. They will preach with the might of God, and men of goodwill will believe in God, and many souls will be comforted. They will make great strides forward through the virtue of the Holy Spirit, and will condemn the diabolical errors of the Antichrist. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth! There will be bloody wars and famines, plagues and infectious diseases. It will rain with a fearful hail of

animals. There will be thunderstorms which will shake cities, earthquakes which will swallow up countries. Voices will be heard in the air. Men will beat their heads against walls, call for their death, and on the other hand death will be their torment. Blood will flow on all sides. Who will be the victor if God does not shorten the duration of the test? At the blood, the tears and the prayers of the righteous. God will relent. Enoch and Elias will be put to death. Pagan Rome will disappear. The fire of Heaven will fall and consume three cities. All the universe will be struck with terror and many will let themselves be led astray because they have not worshipped the true Christ who lives among them. It is time; the sun is darkening; only faith will survive.

“Now is the time, the abyss is opening. Here is the king of kings of darkness, here is the Beast with his subjects, calling himself the Saviour of the world. He will rise proudly into the air to go to Heaven. He will be smothered by the breath of the Archangel Saint Michael. He will fall, and the earth, which will have been in a continual series of evolutions for three days, will open up its fiery bowels; and he will have plunged for eternity with all his followers into the everlasting chasms of hell. And then water and fire will purge the earth and consume all the works of men’s pride and all will be renewed. God will be served and glorified.”

“Then the Holy Virgin gave me, also in French, THE RULE OF A NEW RELIGIOUS ORDER.

“When She had given me the Rule of this new religious Order, the Holy Virgin continued the speech in the same manner (3):

“If they convert, the stones and rocks will change into wheat, and potatoes will be found sown in the earth.”

“Do you say your prayers properly, my children?”

“We both replied, O! no, Madame, not much.”

“Oh! My children, you must say them, morning and evening. When you can do no more, say a Pater and an Ave Maria; and when you have the time to do better, you will say more.”

“Only a few old women go to Mass; the rest work all day Sunday in the summer; and in the winter, when they are at a loose end, they only go to Mass to make fun of religion. During Lent, they go the butcher’s like hungry dogs.”

“Have you ever seen any spoilt wheat, My children?”

“We both answered: “Oh no, Madame.”

“The Holy Virgin turned to Maximin, saying,

“But you, My child, you must have seen some once near le Coin, with your father. The farmer said to your father: ‘Come and see how my wheat’s gone bad!’ You went to see. Your father took two or three ears in his hand, rubbed them, and they fell to dust. Then, on your way back, when you were no more than half an hour away from Corps, your father gave you a piece of

(3) In patois.

bread, and said, 'Take it, eat it while you can, my son, for I don't know who will be eating anything next year if the wheat is spoilt like that!' Maximin replied, 'It's quite true, Madame, I didn't remember.'"

"The Most Holy Virgin brought Her speech to an end in French."

"AND SO, MY CHILDREN, YOU WILL PASS THIS ON TO ALL MY PEOPLE."

"The most beautiful Lady crossed the stream, and after two more steps, without turning back towards us, who were following Her (for we were drawn to Her by Her brilliance and even more by Her kindness which elated me, which seemed to melt my heart), She repeated to us,

"AND SO, MY CHILDREN, YOU WILL PASS THIS ON TO ALL MY PEOPLE."

"Then She walked on up to the place where I had gone to see where our cows were. Her feet touched nothing but the tips of the grass and without bending them. Having reached the top of the little mound, the beautiful Lady stopped, and I hurried to stand in front of Her to look at Her so, so closely, to try and see which path She was most inclined to take. For it was all over for me, I had forgotten both my cows and the masters I worked for. I had attached myself for ever and unconditionally to my Lady. Yes, I wanted, never, ever to leave Her. I followed Her with no other motive, and fully disposed to serve Her for the rest of my life.

"In the presence of my Lady, I felt I had forgotten paradise. I thought of nothing more but to serve Her in every way possible: and I felt I could have done everything She could have asked me to do, for it seemed to me that She had a great deal of power. She looked at me with a tender kindness which drew me to Her. I could have thrown myself into Her arms with my eyes closed. She did not give me the time to do so. She rose imperceptibly from the ground to a height of around four feet or more, and, hanging thus in the air for a split second, my beautiful Lady looked up to Heaven, then down on the earth to Her right and then Her left (4), then She looked at me with Her eyes so soft, so kind and so good that I felt She was drawing me inside Her, and my heart seemed to open up to Hers.

"And as my heart melted away, sweetly gladdened, the beautiful face of my good Lady disappeared little by little. It seemed to me that the light in motion was growing stronger, or rather intensifying around the Most Holy Virgin, to prevent me seeing Her any longer.

"And thus, light took the place of the parts of Her body which were disappearing in front of my eyes, or rather it seemed to me that the body of my Lady was melting into light. The sphere of light rose gently towards the right. I cannot say whether the volume of light decreased as She rose, or

(4) "In which direction had the Holy Virgin turned when she rose?" — "That way (She pointed to the East) . . . I know that Rome is in that direction."
Conversation with Melanie, Miss des Brûlais, 8th Sept. 1849.

whether the growing distance made me see less and less light as She rose. What I do know, is that I was a long time with my head raised up, staring at the light, even after the light, which kept getting further away and decreasing in volume, had finally disappeared. I take my eyes from the firmament, I look around me. I see Maximin looking at me, and I say to him, “‘Maxi, that must have been my father’s Good Lord, or the Holy Virgin, or some other great saint.’” (5) And Maximin throws his arms into the air and says,

“‘Oh! If only I’d known!’”

“The evening of the 19th September, we went back down a little earlier than usual. When I arrived at my master’s farm, I was busy tying up my cows and tidying the stable, and had not yet finished when my mistress came up to me in tears and said,

“‘Why, my child, why didn’t you come and tell me what happened on the mountain?’”

Maximin, not having found his masters who were still at work, had come over to mine and recounted everything he had seen and heard. I replied,

“‘I did want to tell you, but I wanted to get my work finished first.’” A moment later, I walked over to the house and my mistress said to me,

“‘Tell me what you have seen. De Bruite the shepherd (that was the nickname of Pierre Selme, Maximin’s master) has told me everything.’”

“I began, and towards the middle of the account, my masters arrived back from the fields. My mistress, who was in tears at hearing the complaints and threats of our sweet Mother, said,

“‘Ah! You were going to harvest the wheat tomorrow (Sunday). Take great care. Come and hear what happened today to this child and Pierre Selme’s shepherd-boy.’” And turning to me, she said.

“‘Repeat everything you have said.’” “I started again and when I had finished, my master said,

“‘It was the Holy Virgin or else a great saint, who has come on behalf of the Good Lord, but it’s as if the Good Lord had come Himself. We must do what this Saint said. How are you going to manage to tell that to all Her people?’”

“I replied,

“‘You tell me how I must go about it, and I will do it.’” Then, looking at his mother, wife, and brother, he added,

“‘I’ll have to think about that’”. Then everyone went back to their business.

(5) My Father’s Good Lord: this is the crucifix, this living crucifix which the beautiful Lady wears round Her neck, and which seemed to talk to Her. The Holy Virgin... Melanie does not seem to have doubted for a moment that it was Her, this comes out in the account, however, she does not dare to be the first to state it; it is for the Church of Jesus Christ to do so, she has this intuition. In effect, the next morning, it is the parish priest of La Salette who cries out, at the account of the two children,

“‘It was the Holy Virgin who appeared to you’”, and from the pulpit, will announce this to his parishioners, and to all the faithful ones among them.

"After supper, Maximin and his masters came over to see my masters and to recount what Maximin had told them, and decide what was to be done.

"For," they said, "it seems to us that it was the Holy Virgin sent by the Good Lord. The words which She spoke convince us of this. And She told them to pass it on to all Her people. Perhaps these children will have to travel the world over to make it known that everyone must observe the Commandments of the Good Lord, lest great misfortunes come upon us."

After a moment's silence, my master said to Maximin and I,

"Do you know what you must do, my children? Tomorrow, you must get up early and both of you go to see the priest and tell him everything you have seen and heard. Tell him carefully how it all happened. He will tell you what you have to do."

"The 20th September, the day after the Apparition, I left early in the morning with Maximin. When we reached the presbytery, I knocked at the door. The priest's housekeeper came and opened the door and asked us what we wanted. I said to her (in French, and I, who had never spoken French),

"We would like to speak to Father Perrin."

"And what have you got to say to him"? she asked.

"We wish to tell him, Miss, that yesterday we went up to watch over our cows on Baisses mountain, and after dinner, etc . . . etc. We recounted a good piece of the Most Holy Virgin's words. Then the church-bell rang: it was the final call for Mass. Father Perrin, the parish priest of La Salette, who had heard us, flung open his door, he was in tears and was beating his chest. He said to us,

"My children, we are lost, God will punish us. Oh, Good Lord! It was the Holy Virgin who appeared to you!" And he left to say Holy Mass. We looked at each other, Maximin and the housekeeper and I. Then Maximin said to me,

"Me, I'm off home to my father at Corps."

"And we parted company."

"As my masters had not told me to return to work immediately after speaking to Father Perrin, I saw no harm in going to Mass. And so I was in church. Mass begins and after the first reading from the Gospel, Father Perrin turns to the congregation and tries to recount to his parishioners, the story of the Apparition which had just taken place, the day before, on one of their mountains, and he urges them to stop working on Sundays. His voice was broken with sobs, and all the congregation was greatly moved. After Holy Mass, I went back to my masters to work. Mr. Peytard, who still today is the mayor of La Salette (6), came to question me on the Apparition, and when he had made sure that I was speaking the truth, he went away convinced.

"I stayed on in the service of my masters until All Saints' Day. Then I was

(6) Today: 21st November 1878 when this account was written.

boarded with the nuns of Providence, in my home town of Corps.

"The Most Holy Virgin was tall and well-proportioned. She seemed so light that mere breath could have stirred Her, yet She was motionless and perfectly balanced. Her face was majestic, imposing, but not imposing in the manner of the lords here below. She compelled a respectful fear. At the same time as Her Majesty compelled respect mingled with love, She drew me to Her. Her gaze was soft and penetrating. Her eyes seemed to speak to mine, but the conversation came out of a deep and vivid feeling of love for the ravishing beauty which was liquefying me. The softness of Her gaze, Her air of incomprehensible goodness made me understand and feel that She was drawing me to Her and wanted to give Herself. It was an expression of love which cannot be expressed with the tongue of the flesh, nor with the letters of the alphabet.

"The clothing of the Most Holy Virgin was silver white and quite brilliant. It was quite intangible. It was made up of light and glory, sparkling and dazzling. There is no expression nor comparison to be found on earth.

"The Holy Virgin was all beauty and all love; the sight of Her made me long to melt myself into Her. In Her finery as in Her person, everything radiated the majesty, the splendour, the magnificence of a Queen beyond compare. She seemed as white, immaculate, crystalline, dazzling, heavenly, fresh and new as a Virgin. The word LOVE seemed to slip from Her pure and silvery lips. She appeared to me like a good Mother, full of kindness amiability, of love for us, of compassion and mercy.

"The crown of roses which She had placed on Her head was so beautiful, so brilliant, that it defies imagination. The different coloured roses were not of this earth; it was a joining together of flowers which crowned the head of the Most Holy Virgin. But the roses kept changing and replacing each other, and then, from the heart of each rose, there shone a beautiful entrancing light, which gave the roses a shimmering beauty. From the crown of roses there seemed to arise golden branches and a number of other little flowers mingled with the shining ones. The whole thing formed a most beautiful diadem, which alone shone brighter than our earth's sun.

"The Holy Virgin had a most pretty cross hanging round Her neck. This cross seemed golden, I say golden rather than gold-plated, for I have sometimes seen objects which were golden with varying shades of gold, which had a much more beautiful effect on my eyes than simple gold-plate). On this shining, beautiful cross there was a Christ, it was Our Lord on the Cross. Near both ends of the cross there was a hammer, and at the other side a pair of pincers. The Christ was flesh-coloured, but He shone dazzlingly; and the light that shone forth from His whole body seemed like brightly shining darts which pierced my heart with the desire to melt inside Him. At times, the Christ appeared to be dead. His head was bent forward and His body seemed to give way, as if about to fall, had He not been held back by the nails which held him to the Cross.

"I felt a deep compassion and would have like to tell His unknown love to

the whole world, and to let seep into mortal souls the most heart-felt love and gratitude towards a God who had no need whatsoever of us to be everything He is, was and always will be. And yet, O Love that men cannot understand, He made Himself man, and wanted to die, yes, die, so as to better imprint in our souls and in our memory, the passionate love He has for us! Oh, how wretched am I to find myself so poor in my expression of the love of our good Saviour for us! But, in another way, how happy we are to be able to feel more deeply that which we cannot express!

“At other times, the Christ appeared to be alive. His head was erect, His eyes open, and He seemed to be on the cross of His own accord. At times, too, He appeared to speak: He seemed to show that He was on the cross for our sake, out of love for us, to draw us to His love, and that He always has more love to give us, that His love in the beginning and in the year 33 is always that of today and will be for ever more.

“The Holy Virgin was crying nearly the whole time she was speaking to me. Her tears flowed gently, one by one, down to Her knees, then like sparks of light, they disappeared. They were glittering and full of love. I would have liked to comfort Her and stop Her tears. But it seemed to me that She needed the tears to show better Her love forgotten by men. I would have liked to throw myself into Her arms and say to Her,

“‘My kind Mother, do not cry! I want to love you for all men on earth.’”
“But she seemed to be saying to me,

“‘There are so many who do not know me!’”

“I was between life and death, and on one side I saw so much desire to be loved, and on the other much cold indifference ... Oh! my Mother, most beautiful and lovable Mother, my love, heart of my heart!

“The tears of our sweet Mother, far from lessening Her air of majesty, of a Queen and a Mistress, seemed, on the contrary, to embellish Her, to make Her more beautiful, more powerful, more filled with love, more maternal, more ravishing, and I could have licked up Her tears which made my heart leap with compassion and love. Too see a mother cry, and such a Mother, without doing everything possible to comfort Her and change Her grief into joy, is that possible? Oh Mother who is more than good, You have been formed with all the prerogatives God is able to grant; You have married the power of God, so to speak, You are good, and more, You are good with the goodness of God Himself. God has extended Himself by making You His terrestrial and celestial masterpiece.

“The Most Holy Virgin had a yellow pinafore. What am I saying, yellow? She had a pinafore more brilliant than several suns put together. It was not of tangible material, it was composed of glory, and this glory was scintillating, and ravishingly beautiful. Everything in the Holy Virgin carried me firmly and made me kind of slide into the adoration and love of my Jesus in every state of His mortal life.

“The Most Holy Virgin had two chains, one a little wider than the other.

From the narrower one hung the cross which I mentioned earlier. These chains (since they must be given the name of chains) were like rays of brightly shining glory, sparkling and dazzling. Her shoes, (since they must be called shoes) were white, but a silvery brilliant white. There were roses around them. These roses were dazzlingly beautiful, and from the heart of each rose there shone forth a flame of very beautiful and pleasing light. On Her shoes there was a buckle of gold, not the gold of this earth, but rather the gold of paradise.

“The sight of the Holy Virgin was itself a perfect paradise. She had everything needed to satisfy; for earth had been forgotten. The Holy Virgin was surrounded by two lights. The first light, the nearer to the Most Holy Virgin, reached as far as us. It shone most beautifully and scintillatingly.

“The second light shone out a little round the beautiful lady and we found ourselves bathed in it. It was motionless (that is to say that it wasn’t scintillating) but much more brilliant than our poor sun on earth. All this light did not harm nor tire the eyes in any way.

“In addition to all these lights, all this splendour, there shone forth concentrations or beams of light and single rays of light from the body of the Holy Virgin, from Her clothes and from all over Her.

“The voice of the beautiful Lady was soft, it was enchanting, ravishing, warming to the heart. It satisfied, smoothing every obstacle, it soothed and softened. It seemed to me I could never stop drinking in Her beautiful voice, and my heart seemed to dance or want to go towards Her and liquify itself inside Her.

“The eyes of the most Holy Virgin, our Sweet Mother, cannot be described in human language. To speak of them, you would need a seraph, you would need more than that, you would need the language of God Himself, of the God who formed the Immaculate Virgin, the masterpiece of His omnipotence. The eyes of the majestic Mary appeared thousands of times more beautiful than the rarest brilliants, diamonds and precious stones. They shone like two suns; they were soft, softness itself, as clear as a mirror. In Her eyes, you could see paradise. They drew you to Her, she seemed to want to draw and give Herself.

“The more I looked, the more I wanted to see; the more I saw, the more I loved Her and I loved Her with all my might.

“The eyes of the beautiful Immaculate One were like the door to God’s Kingdom, from which you could see all that can elate the soul. When my eyes met those of the Mother of God, I felt inside me a happy revolution of love and a declaration that I loved Her and was melting with love. As we looked at each other, our eyes spoke to each other in their fashion, and I loved Her so much I could have kissed Her in the middle of Her eyes, which touched my soul and seemed to draw it towards them and make it melt into Hers. Her eyes set up a sweet trembling in all my being; and I was afraid to make the slightest movement which might cause her the smallest displeasure.

Just the sight of the eyes of the purest of Virgins would have been enough to make the Heaven of a blessed creature, enough to fill the soul with the will of the Most High amid the events which occur in the course of mortal life, enough to make the soul perform continual acts of praise, of thanksgiving, of atonement and expiation. Just this sight alone focuses the soul on God, and makes it like a living death, looking upon all the things of this earth, even the things which seem the most important, as nothing but children's playthings. The soul would want to hear no one speaking unless they spoke of God, and of that which affects His Glory.

"Sin is the only evil She sees on earth. She will die of grief unless God sustains Her.

Amen."

MARY OF THE CROSS, Victim of Jesus.

née Melanie CALVAT, Shepherdess of La Salette.

Castellamare, 21st November 1878.

AFTER THE APPARITION

When she begins to write, both sides of Melanie's intellect are very pronounced in this account: a meticulous loyalty to the truth bordering on realism, as she relates the facts, where every detail counts and nothing is left out, and, in her view, or contemplation of the Holy Virgin into which her heart transports her, the mystical explosion of feelings which reveals her soul.

We come, on that day, the 19th September 1846, to the turning point of her life. It marks the end of her childhood, the end of that mysterious phase of early initiations. The page is turned. Everything is confirmed, but everything is now renewed, within her, and for her. What she has learnt, what she has seen, now she must live it.

It is up to the "little mute" to speak. She does so unbidden, and more—she speaks French—a language she had never before spoken. And the wild, shy little girl goes without hesitation to knock at the door of the presbytery of La Salette.

As one follows the progression of events beginning on the evening of the 19th and the morning of the 20th, one is aware of a rhythmic advance. The first news of the Apparition is given by young Maximin—or Memin as he is called—the younger, more innocent, less prepared of the two witnesses. Melanie follows with a fuller account. Maximin had caused a commotion, and brought tears to the eyes of those who had heard him. Melanie induces faith. Baptiste Pra, her master declares,

"It was the Holy Virgin or some great saint who came on behalf of the Good Lord; but it's as if the Good Lord Himself had come ... We must do what this great saint has said."

And already the good folk of Ablandins imagine the two children going

round the whole world to pass the Message on to all mankind. Through them the voice of Christendom is heard. And this spontaneously faithful voice calls out to the Magisterium of the Church and tells them,

"Go and find Father Perrin . . ."

The next morning, it is the parish priest, a devoted man, invested with the priesthood for all eternity who proclaims,

"The Holy Virgin Herself has appeared to you!"

Melanie, who until then, had hardly ever entered a church, follows the priest inside and hears Mass. She sits in the back of the nave, hidden behind all the congregation, for, she says (7).

"I was very ashamed, I was afraid they would turn and look at me."

She hears Mass, she says, because her masters had not ordered her to return immediately after seeing Father Perrin. And already the day before, when her master asked her,

"What are you going to do?" she answered,

"Tell me what I must do and I will do it."

These words are typical of Melanie, they sum up her life. She will only take the initiative—and this occurs no more than two or three times during her long life—to safeguard her mission or to defend the secret of her mystical life; at these times, she can stand and fight, or run away. But everywhere and every time, she will retain the most total and immediate submission to those whom Providence has given her for superiors. Here, it is the master given authority over her by the contract of hiring. Elsewhere, later on she will have other masters in the person of her confessors, or priests on whom she depends, amid the events which will shape her destiny and threaten her liberty. Much will be explained, the enigmas of her existence, of her wanderings abroad, by this suppression of her own will. Those who will order or advise her will not always, in fact, be greatly enlightened people. This is not important, but to obey, and obey unhesitatingly, without fear, is to abandon oneself, to give oneself over, to make oneself an offering for sacrifice, and it is to love . . . All is good.

THE ENQUIRY

The parish priest of La Salette, Father Perrin, had confirmed the authenticity of the miracle of the Apparition, and had stated that it was indeed the Holy Virgin who had appeared to the children. He had not said what the children must do. Life—ordinary life—went on. Maximin had gone home to his father at Corps. Melanie finished her duties of shepherdess with her masters at Ablandins, and on All Saints' Day, rejoined her family, it was the Bishop of Grenoble who held the fate of the two witnesses in his hands. He

(7) Note of Mlle des Brûlais, 26th September.

had started by opening an enquiry into the events at La Salette—an enquiry which was to last no less than five years.

During this time, it was necessary to place the two children at the disposal of the investigators, and keep them under discreet, continual surveillance, so as to ascertain the nature of their morality. In addition, they had to be taught. The convent set up by the Sisters of Providence of Corenc (near Grenoble) in Corps itself, offered all the desired guarantees. Through the good offices of the Bishop, and at his personal expense, Melanie and Maximin were boarded there from the 2nd December 1846.

The Bishop of Grenoble was at that time Philibert de Bruillard. At the head of the diocese since 1826, he was a man of some eighty years, but such were his youthful vigour and moral energy that old age had in no way affected his pastoral activity.

Bishop de Bruillard is one of the finest figures of the Hierarchy of France, and one of the noblest exceptions among the concordatary and bureaucratic Episcopate of his time. His lofty aristocratic bearing was tempered with so much affable generosity that he was dear to the poor of his flock. His theological knowledge made him truly the teacher of his priests, and his knowledge of the soul was based on long, refined experience.

It was rumoured that he was an illegitimate son of Louis XV, and he bore a certain resemblance to him. The place and date of his birth, his early education at Dijon remained obscure. Ordained in the chapel of the archbishopric of Paris in September 1789, his academic prowess at the college of Navarre and at the seminary of Saint-Sulpice seemed to be heading him for a professorship.

The violent outbreak of the Revolution the following month caused these establishments to be closed, and transformed the destiny of the newly-ordained priest. He could have preached the constitutional sermon, he could have emigrated. He stayed on in Paris, independant, faithful. He survived, hidden behind a series of disguises, escaped imprisonment, and under continual threat but never captured, he became one of those heroic chaplains of the condemned, who each in turn, once a week, would secretly accompany the carts to the guillotine, and mingling with the crowd, would watch the lips and eyes of the condemned man for the call of the soul, and would answer it with priestly prayer and final absolution.

"Monsieur Philibert's" day was Wednesday. He was present at the death of Louis XVI, and, so it is said, gave absolution to Marie-Antoinette while walking behind her cart. He also spent much time in the service of the sick and dying who were deprived of spiritual help, and would cover all Paris and its outskirts to this end, often dressed as a National Guard (he had been drafted into the National Guard and this saved his life). He secretly organised the thinly scattered nuns and when the Terror was over and they could, little by little, re-open little schools, they found a willing chaplain in him. It was thus that he met and guided Sophie Barat and played a great part in

giving direction to this chosen soul and in the foundation, by her, of the teaching Congregation of the Ladies of the Sacred-Heart.

In 1803, he became canon of Notre-Dame in Paris; in 1810, parish priest of Saint-Nicholas du Chardonnet; in 1821, parish priest of Saint-Etienne du Mont, where he had as parishioners nearly all the youth from the national colleges. From there the Minister of Religion sent him to administer the enormous diocese of Grenoble. Bishop de Bruillard had, for twenty years, demonstrated as much wisdom as single-mindedness. Easily accessible to all, patient and kind, he had a deep awareness of the meaning of his authority, and a profound sense of responsibility. He often found refuge in prayer, led a life of mortification and poverty, and disposed liberally of his personal fortune for the good of his diocesans. When he was informed of the facts of La Salette and the situation of the children, he took their education upon himself and even gave a small allowance to Melanie's parents.

He had no intention of passing judgement on the Apparition before taking all the precautions of an impartial observer. Bishop de Bruillard appointed to begin with, in December 1846, two commissions, one of canons, the other of professors, instructed to examine, separately, every detail of the preliminary investigation, and to draw up, without any consultation, each its own report.

These examinations of the interrogations of the children and of the circumstances of the Apparition lasted seven months. Then a single commission of sixteen members assembled for eight meetings presided over by the Bishop. Here, opposition to official recognition of the Miracle began to be heard. The leading supporter of this view was the parish priest of Saint-Joseph de Grenoble, Father Cartellier. Bishop de Bruillard, far from contradicting him, simply requested him to be more precise in his arguments. He wrote to him (8th January 1848),

"I await a prompt, if possible, written statement from you of anything you have learnt about the children which throws a shadow over the testimonies of the children and makes them suspect in your eyes." (Dossier Chaper, No. 44).

Finding nothing to prove his insinuations, he invented the method, adopted so often after him, of discrediting the witnesses.

Melanie especially, less likeable than Maximin, and more enigmatic was now the target for vague but damaging allusions which percolated into peoples' conversations and were soon to overtake her in an attempt to distort her testimony and denigrate her character.

The enquiry nevertheless came to an end with the doctrinal edict in which Bishop de Bruillard conferred a miraculous authenticity upon the Apparition and authorised pilgrimages to La Salette. Signed on the 19th September 1851, it was read from the pulpit in the whole diocese of Grenoble on the 16th of the following November. And, in May 1852, despite his great age, Bishop de Bruillard rode on horseback to the holy mountain and there laid the foundation stone of the sanctuary dedicated to Our Lady of La Salette. In order to serve it, he associated an order of Missionaries with it.

Approval from Rome had been sent to the Bishop of Grenoble on the 7th October 1851. (Letter from Cardinal Lambruschini, Prefect of the Holy Congregation of Rites). A papal Rescript on the 4th August 1852, consecrated the special altar to the new sanctuary, which would later be raised to a Basilica. (February 1879)

QUESTIONINGS

During these long delays, Melanie and Maximin never ceased to be prey not only to the official investigators, but to priests and to laymen which piety or mere curiosity were bringing in ever-growing numbers to La Salette.

The nuns of the Providence of Corps had soon taken a liking to these exceptional pupils. They presided over the meetings of the children with the pilgrims whom they greeted freely.

It was thus that Mlle des Brûlais, a pious and cultivated primary school teacher from Nantes, and one of the first of those to be miraculously healed at La Salette, received the hospitality of their house on seven successive occasions, in 1847, 1849, 1851, 1852, 1853, 1854 and 1855. She was fully informed of all that concerned them by the Mother Superior and Sister Saint-Thécle who had personal care of the children. She saw them personally, questioned them, was present when they were questioned by priests. Her notes and letters enable us to grasp their attitudes and picture their appearance.

Generally speaking, and at first meeting, it is Maximin who is the more likeable. His impatience, his innocence, his winning ways and his mischievous pranks are amusing, and in striking contrast with his serious mood when the Apparition is mentioned. In his simplicity, he often appeals to Melanie about this. She alone saw the face of the Beautiful Lady and felt Her gaze. He only managed to see, between Her body and Her hair, a dazzling brightness.

When called to the visiting room, Melanie appears with a reserved bearing, she gives precise but short answers. She remains pensive and at times, melancholic. She has the habit of pouting sulkily, having outbursts of malice, and when some remark seems absurd to her, she shrugs her shoulders. She has only just started to learn French and still speaks in a rustic fashion. The rough shepherdess is still visible under the convent girl. For the "she-wolf of the woods" is now a boarder at the convent. She, who believed that everyone was like her, is obliged to become like everyone else. She has complied with the rules and customs of the boarding-school. She studies in class, takes part in games, and—perhaps the most difficult thing for her—instead of playing all alone with the little flowers of the Good Lord, she must be kind to her companions, fall in with their games, their conversations, and respond to the questions of the good sisters and the "interviews" with the visitors.

The Mother Superior confides to Mlle des Brûlais that "despite the defects

of her early education, Melanie's character is changing for the better, and she is making great strides, becoming less sulky and more sociable." This was another kind of fight to the ones at Saint-Michel and Quet-en-Beaumont, that the little girl was now going through. What amount of secret effort, what outlay of inner will-power, what persevering conquest of self-will must have been required of her for this secret battle! Her humble obedience no doubt made her worthy of the necessary graces and perhaps her little Brother told her—without speaking—what she must do and say. Mlle des Brûlais noted down most of her answers. Many of her interrogators sought to upset her to put her truthfulness to better test. Nothing disconcerts her. She NEVER CHANGES ONE WORD of her account of the Apparition which she is requested to go through again continually. She never loses patience, she remains imperturbable.

"The Holy Virgin," she is told (8)," ordered you to proclaim all this to Her people. Since you are here, are you doing so?"

"I tell all who ask me."

"Why do you not go and make it known in cities everywhere?"

"The nuns do not let me go."

"If the Holy Virgin ordered you, would you go?"

"I would."

"Do you like talking about it?"

"It doesn't bother me."

"Would you prefer not talk about it?"

"I would, as long as they knew about it."

"Did you go and tell the Mayor (of La Salette) about it?"

"No, he came to ask us about it."

"I believe he wanted to give you some money?"

Why?"

"So we would not talk about it . . . and I didn't want any money."

"How much was he offering you?"

"How do I know? *I threw it in his face.*"

"Someone taught you that?"

"Why, yes, Monsieur, someone taught me. If someone hadn't taught me, I wouldn't know it, would I?"

"Who taught you, then?"

"A person, Monsieur."

"Who is this person?"

"The one I just said." (9)

"How did you manage to remember the whole story, when you say it was only told to you once? That's the third time I've heard you recount it and I couldn't repeat it."

(8) Mlle des Brûlais, Echo of the Holy Mountain, Note of 19th September 1847.

(9) Mlle des Brûlais, notes, 19th September 1847.

"Monsieur, if the Holy Virgin had said it to you, you would remember it."

On her pilgrimage of the 19th September 1847, Mlle des Brûlais is there with Melanie.

"The crowd had soon surrounded us," she says, "as soon as someone pointed out" 'the little girl of the Holy Virgin', but herself, you would have thought her a stranger to this multitude, from her bearing, the impassive look on her face. Someone was clumsy enough to say to her, 'look at all these people. You're the cause of all this!' Melanie did not reply, but shrugged her shoulders, and after that, she put all her concentration into remaining out of sight. Until at last, no longer able to avoid the mobs which were formed anew where ever she passed, she decided to show a clean pair of heels and make off with her father, making her way across the mountain paths where I soon saw her disappear from sight. She had, however, again and again satisfied the pious curiosity of these groups and had repeated the words which the Lady had bidden her pass on to her people. She had even consented to do so with kindness and simplicity *as far as she considered it useful*. Such was the multitude, that, to ensure order, it was a matter of sending for the police. Melanie said unhappily,

"I don't like that. If there is no trouble, they'll say it's 'cos of them police."
(10)

A little later on when opposition to the miracle gives rise to malicious gossip, someone tells her,

"This Lady you call the Holy Virgin, she's in prison at Gap."

"Only God can put that Lady in prison, so I shall love to be in that prison."

On her second pilgrimage (11th September 1847), Mlle des Brûlais brings along some pictures which she has had drawn of the Apparition and shows them to the witnesses. With the point of a pencil, Melanie makes a hole where the head of a figure representing her had been.

"I don't like pictures with me in them."

On the 18th September, 1849, before a group of some thirty people, several priests keep on and on turning Melanie's answers around and upside down, doing their utmost to drag some words of her "Secret" out of her.

"Was the Secret entrusted to you in French?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"But you didn't understand French, did you?"

"No, I did not."

"So how did you understand the Secret?"

"I do not know. *If it was the wish of the Holy Virgin, Monsieur, I understood.*

"... Your masters at A blandins, they too only knew the patois. So why, on the evening of the Apparition, did you speak to them in French?"

"I said what I had heard."

(10) Mlle des Brûlais, p.30, ed. Douchet, 1904.

"You said it without understanding what you were saying?"

"Yes." (11)

In another conversation, (18th September 1854), Mlle des Brûlais notes moreover, that Melanie is incapable of saying in patois what the Holy Virgin had said in French, and vice versa. Mlle des Brûlais attempts a translation and despite everything Melanie judges it to be accurate.

One speaker asks her,

"And so you repeated the French part of the Speech parrot-fashion?"

She replies,

"YES."

"You did not understand until later?"

"That's right, only when I learned French."

The questions continue:

"Melanie, aren't you bored repeating the same thing so often?"

"No, Monsieur."

"But it must annoy you, especially when people ask embarrassing questions?"

"They never ask embarrassing questions."

In 1849, Melanie is eighteen years old. Although she has developed physically, she still only looks fifteen. She is still shy and taciturn, but has good manners; she is not pretty, but possesses a certain charm. Mlle des Brûlais is becoming more and more interested in her. She has been able, the day before her pilgrimage of 19th September 1849, to speak to the young girl alone when she brings her a candlestick to take up to her bedroom. Mlle des Brûlais requests that she ask a blessing for her from the Holy Virgin, and Melanie replies that she will do so.

"But," she adds, "the Holy Virgin won't ask me for the blessing I ask for myself."

"How do you know the Holy Virgin won't ask you?"

"Because she hasn't given it to me."

"How do you know she hasn't given it to you?"

"Oh, I know ... since I haven't died."

"You are asking for death? Why?"

"Because I don't like staying on earth ... It's too ugly." (12)

Mlle de Brûlais asks her whether, nonetheless, she does not feel a desire to choose a way of life. Which one?

(11) The reader is referred to the episode of the conversion of Maurice in the autobiography.

(12) From 3 of her letters to Mr. Schmid (14, 21, Sept. 1895, and 2 Oct. 1895) "This desire to die has been with me for 50 years... Why did I not die at her feet (of the Virgin Mary) when Her sweet and loving eyes seemed to draw me, melt me within Her? I am troubled to go on living... and yet if this is what you want, my dear Jesus, then it's what I want too, but in that case, hide from me the injuries your creatures do you."

"Well, a nun ..."

And she leaves the room, deep in thought.

Most of the curiosity revolves around the Secret of which Melanie will not breathe a single word. The question is put to her of the prophecies, or rather the warnings in the speech of the Holy Virgin. Not one bit of it has come true, a sceptic objects.

"You are in a hurry, Monsieur," says Melanie, "God is not like men: He does not punish straight away." (19th September 1849).

And, without insistence, when contradictions are thrown at her thick and fast,

"I say what I have heard. If you don't want to believe, let it be ..."

"What were you thinking while She was talking to you?"

"Nothing ... I was listening."

If she is speaking in confidence, however, and if Mlle des Brûlais, anxious to have an accurate as possible picture of the Apparition, urges her to describe the "Beautiful Lady", Melanie is moved,

"Oh! What a look She gave me as She rose, when my eyes met Hers!"
And she weeps.

SISTER MARY OF THE CROSS

Between the second and third of Mlle des Brûlais' pilgrimages, Melanie Calvat has entered the Mother Convent of the nuns of Providence at Corenc, close to Grenoble. She has been admitted as a postulant on the 10th October 1850, and takes the veil on the 9th October 1851. She is asked what name she wishes to take. She would have liked to be called "Sister Victim of Jesus". It is brought to her attention that this is a Carmelite name and not that of a nun chosen for the active life of teaching. So she chooses the name of "SISTER MARY OF THE CROSS",

From then on it is under this name that Mlle des Brûlais refers to her.

Melanie has not been able to enter the religious life without difficulties nor without danger.

Mother Thérèse de Maximy, who was in charge of her studies at the Corenc noviciate, recounts in her diary,

"As soon as she had spoken of her plans, her father went to fetch her from the convent (at Corps) and forced her to go home with him. He wanted her to give up her plans—but she was resolute. For four days she went without food and sleep. During the night she waited for the right moment to make her escape, but she had no chance. Her father, gun in hand, never left the door. One day the Shepherdess led her brothers and sisters in prayer and afterwards she told them,

'Whatever is done to hold me back will be in vain in the end. I shall go and shut myself away in a convent ... I want to be a nun, or else I'd rather die

than stay in this ocean of crimes which floods the earth . . . ' The children did not omit to repeat the whole thing to their father. So great was his anger that he loaded his gun, stormed out of the house, seized the little shepherd-girl, stood her in front of him and shot . . . God permitted that the bullet pass beneath her arm . . . After a few days, Providence allowed a gentleman from Paris who was very fond of Melanie to be in Corps at the time. Scarcely had he learnt from the inhabitants what was happening when he rushed down to find her father Mathieu (13). Mathieu owed six hundred francs to this gentleman. The gentleman told him, that if he would sell Melanie to him, he would cancel the debt. Her father agreed to this. The sale took place on the first Friday of the month at three o'clock in the afternoon. Melanie was very happy to have this small resemblance to Our Lord. From this moment on she was a little more free. The next day she left for Grenoble and went to visit Bishop Philibert who sent her to Corenc."

These details are confirmed in the diary of Father Combe. On the 11th September 1901, he is on a pilgrimage to La Salette with Melanie. He writes, "I have seen the Drac and the house where her father, toll-collector on the bridge, shut her in the cellar for six days after shooting her and missing, and the mound which the bullet hit having passed beneath her arm."

Having left her parents, who at last have set her free, it is to her bishop that Melanie goes. She carries on in complete obedience. And she desires a religious life, and in her respect and her love for the Church, she runs instinctively under the wing of the pastor of the diocese. His Lordship receives her with kindness, blesses her and sends her to Corenc. He will not lose sight of her there. He remarks to Mlle des Brûlais on her way back from a visit to Corenc, much enlightened by the impression made on her by Sister Mary of the Cross, and who has the opportunity to call on the Bishop in Grenoble,

"It's true. She is remarkable."

Mlle des Brûlais pays three visits to Melanie at the convent of Providence at Corenc: in September 1851, May 1852, and September 1853. During the first of these visits, Melanie is still a postulant. She only sees her for a moment, but she writes to a friend the same day (21st September 1851),

"This young girl is an angel who now seems only attached to earth by her body, but whose spirit and heart are at the feet of Him who enraptures her so."

On her second visit she writes,

"Sister Mary of the Cross looks charming in her novice's dress which is in such perfect keeping with her modest and most virginal bearing. I asked her if she was happy that his Lordship had founded a Congregation of Our Lady of La Salette.

(13) Melanie's father had been appointed toll-collector on the new bridge over the Drac. The 600 francs advanced by the Parisian gentleman had helped him to pay the necessary security.

"Oh, yes! I'm very happy about that," she replied, "and when there are sisters of Our Lady of La Salette, I shall be even happier." (14)

She said to someone,

"If I were a priest, how I would preach penance! ..."

At the time of her third visit (1st October 1853), Mlle des Brûlais notes:

"Faithful to the meaning of her holy name, Sister Mary of the Cross continues to show a great attraction toward suffering and a burning desire for death. She seems sad. Her Superiors are well pleased with her piety and her submission to the observance of the Rule. Every voice in the Community was in favour of her taking her vows during the general retreat which has just taken place at Corenc. However ... her superiors considered it fitting that this happy occasion, the object of the dearest wish of her heart, be postponed. The reasons for this delay, which was so painful for her, is, I am told, that as Sister Mary of the Cross was distracted during the first year of her noviciate by too many visitors, this first year was considered unsatisfactory. The noviciate lasts two years."

There is a somewhat surprising contradiction between the unanimous feeling of the Community and the decision of the Superiors. And Melanie is saddened. What is happening? Bishop Philibert has recently retired from his see in Grenoble. Bishop Ginoulhiac has succeeded him. It is he who inspires, if not forces the decision of the Superiors. Melanie yields to their will and is silent. Much later she will write, in a letter to Mlle Vernet of the 3rd July 1894,

"My board and lodging with the Sisters of Providence, which my Lord Bishop de Bruillard had always paid for me, was suspended on the arrival of my Lord Bishop Ginoulhiac. Everything has changed. I was someone in the way. I give thanks for the mercy of God which supported me in my nothingness. Like the blessed rain which settles the dust which the wind has stirred up, so humiliation, persecution and privation return the soul to its nothingness ..."

(14) Taken from the handwritten notebook of Mother de Maximy, "On a pilgrimage which Sister Mary of the Cross made to La Salette in 1852, she moved to one side, on Mount Plateau, behind the chancel of the sanctuary... On the end of the small plateau on the far side of the mountain, she caught sight of a pretty little girl... She ran over to the child, who looked a very pleasant girl, kissed her and began to talk to her,

'You must come with me to the convent,' she told her.

'Yes, but I'm poor,' said the child, 'and you can't enter your convent without money.'

'Come with me, all the same. My Mother Thérèse of Jesus will accept you without money.'

'She's not the Mother Superior,' replied the child.

'That's true... but when there's a convent at La Salette, will you come?'

'I would like that very much, but on condition that I will be the Mother Superior there.'

With these words the child disappeared and Sister Mary of the Cross realised it was her Mother in Heaven.

THE MATTER OF THE SECRET

It is not simply the insignificant question of L.s.d. which has caused the new bishop of Grenoble to veto Melanie's taking of vows.

At Saint-Roch, as we recall, before giving her the mystic kiss, her Brother warned her of "contradictions and battles for the truth". The contradiction comes. The battle commences. At the time of her vision of the dove, did Melanie not say,

"I cannot see the Cross?" And did her brother not reply,

"The Cross? I have put it within and without." The little dove, the "Victim of Jesus", will now begin to feel the cross.

From the start of the questionings which the two witnesses underwent, what intrigues the visitors and especially among their ranks the members of the clergy, are the secrets which Melanie and Maximin say they received, one after the other, from the Holy Virgin, and concerning which their lips are tightly sealed.

On the younger, more emotional Maximin, various kinds of pressure are exerted. He is flattered, offered gold, attempts are made to surprise him and lead him into giving himself away. The motive of the journey to Ars in 1850, on which some legitimist politicians drag Maximin, despite the orders of Bishop de Bruillard, in the hope that the holy priest will tear the secret from the little shepherd boy. What a piece of sensational propaganda for the party, if the secret reveals that the Holy Virgin has said that France needs a king! But it is a complete failure. Maximin is sulky. He does not understand what the old, toothless priest says to him in the confessional. The priest cannot understand the child and believes Maximin has told him that he didn't see the Holy Virgin. Of the secret, not a whisper. It is rumoured that Maximin has gone back on his word. The news is rushed to Melanie, who, in a state of doubt, is distressed by it and says,

"The wretched boy!"

She perseveres without any trouble with her unchanging testimony of the Apparition, and with her absolute stubborn silence concerning her secret.

The legitimist party members came from Lyons. The Archbishop of Lyons, Cardinal de Bonald was concerned over the incident at Ars. He informed the Bishop of Grenoble, towards the end of March, 1851 that the Pope had expressed to him the desire to learn the secret of the two witnesses (15).

When Melanie, in her noviciate at Corenc, was put in the picture by the envoy of Bishop de Bruillard, Father Auvergne, she told him,

"It isn't the Pope who is asking for my secret, it's other people who have told him to ask me for it."

It is a very delicate, moreover impossible question, whether the Pope's wish

(15) Accounts of Maximin, *Annals of La Salette*, July 1886, pp. 209-214; December 1886, pp. 189-298.

was a spontaneous decision or whether, and to what degree, it was suggested by the cardinal of Lyons. It appears that, since Rome had been informed five years ago of the events at La Salette, and had been in communication on this account with the Bishop of Grenoble, all Rome had to do, in order to have an order conveyed or a wish expressed to him, was to make Cardinal de Bonald the intermediary. Bishop de Bruillard decided to send the secrets directly to the Pope, as demanded by the Supreme Majestatis Constitution of the 19th December 1516.

But first the secrets had to be obtained from the children. Bishop de Bruillard intended to respect their freedom; and yet, if the Pope had spoken, was it not for him to obey? The matter was revealed openly to both children. Their attitudes, and in no way was there any consultation, (Maximin is now at the Little Seminary in Grenoble, Melanie at Corenc) are identical. They refuse. If the Pope commands, they will reveal their secrets, but to him alone.

Maximin makes up his mind fairly quickly, and, with what seems to be a certain satisfaction (16). Melanie is troubled. Father Auvergne, and the Canon Rousselot go up to Corenc to persuade her of her duty of obedience to the Pope. She resists. The Holy Virgin has forbidden her to tell. She is disturbed; she cries. "She is in the greatest agitation," the Mother Superior of Corenc tells Canon Rousselot (17).

During the night, she dreamt of what was the object of her meeting with Father Auvergne, and her room-mate heard her say,

"They're asking for my secret ... I must tell my secret to the Pope or be separated from the Church." (Father Auvergne had not in any way mentioned separation from the Church nor excommunication, she herself has drawn this conclusion.) More than forty times she repeated,

"Be separated from the Church! ..."

So she will obey. But she makes clear to Canon Rousselot (18),

"I wish to speak to the Pope alone, and when he commands it. I will tell it to him alone, or I will write it down in a sealed letter."

"And this sealed letter, who will you hand it to, for it to be given to the Pope?"

"To my Lord Bishop."

"Would you not have it handed over by his Grace the Cardinal Archbishop of Lyons?"

"No, Monsieur."

"And why?"

"Because in Lyons, La Salette is not much believed in, and then because I don't want anyone to break the seal of my letter."

(16) Speaking of the journey to Ars, Maximin had said, "I did a stupid thing, it's true, but that's what put the secret on the road to Rome." (quoted by Mlle des Brûlais)

(17) Official report by Canon Rousselot.

(18) Official Report by Canon Rousselot.

"But when the Pope learns your secret, will you be angry if he makes it known?"

"No, Monsieur, that will concern him, it will be his business." Melanie lowers her head, smiling, and asks in turn of Canon Rousselot,

"And if the secret concerned him directly?"

"In such a case," Canon Rousselot replies, "the Pope would do what he considered right and proper." (Father Rousselot, *A New Sanctuary to Mary*, Grenoble, Baratier, 1853, pp. 54 and following.)

On their return from Rome, the delegated messengers who took the secret will tell her that the Pope was visibly troubled by what he read . . .

"It didn't appear to be very comforting?"

"Comforting?" she said to him.

"Yes. Do you know what the word means?"

"Oh, yes, I know, it means "that which gives pleasure." But surely this must give pleasure to the Pope: *a Pope must love suffering* . . ." Mlle des Brûlais, who notes this remark in a letter written in Corps on 21st September 1857, adds,

"All those present at this meeting were struck by this phrase and by the heavenly smile which accompanied it."

It was on the 3rd July 1851 that Melanie first wrote down her secret, at the convent of Providence at Corenc, before two witnesses, the canon of Taxis, and Mr. Dausse, a borough engineer. She filled three pages at one go, signed it without re-reading, put them into an envelope on which she wrote, "To his Holiness Pope Pius IX, Rome." The next day, Melanie went down to Grenoble, to the bishop's palace, "to put a date on something which I forgot" as she later said to Mlle des Brûlais in September. She opened the envelope and recopied her secret. She asked those present the meaning of "unfailingly", of "defiled" (defiled city), and the spelling of "antichrist". She sealed the envelope and went away calmly.

The two letters, of Melanie and Maximin, were taken to Rome by canon Rousselot and Father Gerin, the curate of Grenoble Cathedral. They were delivered to the Pope in person, in a private audience. Bishop de Bruillard had made no attempt to learn the secrets. He had acted most uprightly and properly towards the children and towards the Pope (19). He was eighty-seven years old. Having laid the foundation stone of the sanctuary on the mountain sanctified by the Apparition, and having established a body of missionaries to serve it, and having put the affairs of his diocese in order, he offered his resignation to the Holy See and to the Minister of Religion, and bade farewell to the clergy and to the faithful of the diocese of Grenoble with a pastoral letter dated 21st December 1852. He wished to devote his last years to silence and to prayer. He retired to the house of the Ladies of the Sacred

(19) In the knowledge that the Pope alone could pass judgement on the prophetic secrets, which were integral parts of the Apparition.

Heart, at Montfleury, above Grenoble. He insisted, however, on bearing witness to his faith in the Apparition and his devotion to Mary, by going up to La Salette to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of his consecration as Bishop. He spent three days, from the fourth to seventh of August 1856, among the pilgrims to whom he preached again. He was ninety-two years old. He died on the 15th December 1860.

CONTRADICTIONS

For Melanie, it was the loss of her ecclesiastical tutor. He had known her as a child, the day after the Apparition. He had followed her progress, supported her, helped her to enter the religious life. He had confidence in her, and she trusted and venerated him.

Bishop Ginoulhiac, who succeeded him, had the reputation of being a prelate of enlightened faith, and an excellent administrator. He donned the episcopal robes at the very time when, after the Revolution of 1848 and the unrest which followed, Napoleon III was restoring the empire, which to all eyes was a promise of peace to come. His long, pronounced features, mediterranean temperament and bonapartist beliefs cut him out, it could be thought, for success under this regime.

The shepherds' secrets were a source of anxiety to him. He would have liked to learn them and then dispose of the matter. If legitimist party members had attempted to make Maximin reveal his secret, did this not mean that the secrets of La Salette were an encouragement to Royalist aims, and could create, especially among catholics, a movement of opposition to the Imperial Government? His duty was to avoid this kind of thing. As it was well known that Melanie's secret was longer than Maximin's and had held the attention of the Pope for much longer, she, much more so than Maximin, was in possession of these dangerous revelations. At any moment, she might broadcast them. Her presence was a threat to the good order of the diocese.

In a letter dated 3rd July 1894 to Mlle Vernet, Melanie writes, in answer to questions put to her,

"The Bishop of Grenoble, in reply to those who asked him the reason for his behaviour towards the two shepherds ... (several words are missing) ... that his pride had been wounded by the refusal of the shepherds to reveal their secrets to him, and that he was resolved to get revenge for this insult; 2). That he wished to bring Napoleon's favour upon himself and that he exiled the shepherd-girl in order to have himself appointed an Archbishop or Cardinal by the Emperor, etc ..."

The young novice of Corenc was not perhaps always in control of the prophetic impulses which were a surprise to herself. Had she let out some reference to the "two-faced" Napoleon? Would she already have given a hint

of her foreboding of the collapse of the Empire and the Prussian invasion?" In a letter to Mr. Schmid of the 28th October 1896, she says,

"I remember it well, in the class-room during recreation at the Mother Convent of the nuns of Providence at Corenc near Grenoble, I wrote in chalk on a large blackboard: 'The Prussians in 1870.' That's all there is of the truth in the matter."

The singular objectivity of this statement is proof of the witness's involuntary inspiration.

There was still more to come.

In a note, which at his request, she handed over to Father Combe (20), Melanie points out what took place in 1852.

"Scarcely," she says, "had I heard from Father Sibillat (21) that several priests in the diocese of Grenoble were joining together to form an Order of Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette, and that a rule was to be drawn up for it, when I immediately told Father Sibillat that the Holy Virgin had given all that was necessary for the members, and that, if he would wait a moment, I would go and quickly write down some part of the Rule. After I had handed him a few articles of the Rule, he left. A few days later he came back and told me that Bishop Ginoulhiac thought me a conceited, deluded, insane young girl, and that these papers should be burnt ..."

Father Sibillat told me, moreover, that the articles had been sent for examination to the Great Carthusian monastery at Chartreuse, to decide whether the words "This is the Rule which *you* will have observed ..." applied to me personally; and with the verdict that these words concerned the shepherd-girl, the Rule was plunged into oblivion and the matter was closed. And, from that moment on, they redoubled their zeal to exile me from France, or at least, from the diocese."

The traditional Rules, in force in the Church for centuries were adaptable to almost any institution, and so the Church provisionally refused the innovations with regard to religious life. In rejecting *a priori* the articles brought to him by Father Sibillat, the Bishop of Grenoble was thus taking up a canonical position, and his first move was quite legitimate. Perhaps he might, in order to be better informed, have requested a communication of the complete text, of which Melanie had given but a few fragments. Perhaps—Corenc is 2½ miles from Grenoble—he might have summoned Melanie, to tell him that what she had seen and heard when the Rule had

(20) Diary of Father Combe, 8th November 1902.

(21) Father Sibillat, former chaplain to the Training College at Grenoble, and one of the first missionaries of La Salette, and who then resigned. He was confessor to the nuns of Providence. He confessed Melanie, whose little Brother that told her that "she must tell everything to Father Sibillat and to Mother Thérèse of Jesus de Maximy". He compelled Melanie to draw up the short autobiography. He knew she was stigmatised, from Mother Maximy's notebook.

been dictated to her (22), and enquired as to the manner in which she herself understood the phrase submitted for examination by the Carthusians, and finally realised that far from abolishing or undermining ecclesiastical law, this Rule of La Salette is more likely to breathe new life into it, with the rebirth of the spirit of the Gospel, of spiritual Infancy united with the Spirit of Sacrifice.

But one single point seems to have captured all the attention of Bishop Ginoulhiac, and to have aroused his indignation: this rough-draft of a Rule, transcribed (invented, perhaps, how can we know?) by an illiterate peasant-girl; she, herself, intended to put it into practice! This poor little girl was playing at being a Founder! Such extravagant, intolerable and even dangerous ambition ...

From then on Melanie found herself in a false position at the Mother Convent of Corenc. If the kindness of many of the nuns towards her was still unchanging, if the affectionate trust of her Mistress at the noviciate supported her still, criticism, slander and malicious gossip were clamouring around her, distorting the facts, and circulating a false image of her.

It was claimed that she had once said, to the gathered community, that Bishop Ginoulhiac was mad.

"Is it true that you said this or something approaching it about your bishop?" asked Father Combe when getting her to clarify her memories (23).

"No, not at all, Father. One day when Our Lord was showing me His love, I cried out, without thinking I could be heard: My Lord, you are mad, mad, mad! My Lord Bishop Ginoulhiac thought I had said it about him ..."

The personal note-book of Mother Thérèse de Maximy, the mistress of the novices, and a witness of the incident, gives more detail:

"One day the whole community of Providence was gathered in the chapel for morning prayer," she notes, "when suddenly the deep silence was shattered by the loud and intelligible voice of Sister Mary of the Cross:

'Oh! my Jesus! You are mad, yes, you are mad with love, mad, mad, mad!'

(22) "I am prepared to swear by my own flesh and blood that it was the Most Holy Virgin who dictated the Rule to Me." Letter to Father Combe, Messina, 7th July 1898. While she was hearing its terms, Melanie had the "Sight" of this Rule, that is to say, saw its application. Melanie had no desire whatsoever to be in charge of anything of any kind. She wrote to Father Combe from Messina, on the 29th December 1897, where she had accepted for one year only the direction of a religious institution,

"I was in no way born to lead."

On the other hand, she considered that the rule of the Holy Virgin was so well designed to fit into the morality in force in religious life, that she wrote to Canon de Brandt, on the subject of three nuns resolved to form a small nucleus of order of the Mother of God,

"The sisters do not understand that being of the Third-Order of St. Dominic (she herself belonged to it) does not prevent them observing the Rule of Mary and carrying out the works mentioned in this Rule." (18th January, 1891.)

(23) Diary of Father Combe, 8th-9th November 1902.

These words caused a general smile in the chapel. But the indignant Mother Superior gestured to the mistress of the novices to take Sister Mary of the Cross away, which she did immediately, pulling her unceremoniously from her seat and pushing her by the shoulder as she told her,

‘Idiot! distracting and disturbing everyone during prayer!’ And the novice walked humbly along in front of her mistress, her head and her eyes lowered.

‘On the evening of the same day, she came to see the Assistant who asked her why she had spoken out loud in the chapel:

‘Mother,’ Replied Sister Mary of the Cross, ‘I was not aware I had. I was telling Jesus that he must be mad with love to stay in the Blessed Sacrament for his creatures who are so ungrateful, but I didn’t think I was saying it out loud.’

Despite her profound humility (Mother de Maximy noted that she said to her,

‘The tiniest flower in the fields manifests the glory of God better and is more faithful than I . . .’), Melanie suffers in both body and soul from these adverse misunderstandings. Her health seems affected. And so an excuse is found to have her decently removed from the Mother Convent of Corenc.

Mlle des Brûlais was able to write to a friend on the 6th September 1854, from Corps,

‘I am happy, believe you me, my good friend, to find myself back here again with Sister Mary of the Cross who has greeted me most kindly. She has kept that modest air, that reserved manner which, to me, seems her personal stamp. Her health has been slightly upset, so her Superiors have sent her back again to see her dear mountain and to breathe her native air. But she is visibly suffering morally while at Corps, because of her family, which is a subject of renewed trials for her (24). So now she is back at Providence in Corps, where she returns humbly under the authority of her former Mother Superior.

THE BOOK OF PRESSED FLOWERS

A touching scene occurs between this Mother Superior, Mlle des Brûlais and Melanie.

‘On the invitation of the Mother Superior,’ writes Mlle des Brûlais, 11th September 1854, ‘in the afternoon, Sister Mary of the Cross showed me a book of pressed flowers which she had picked on her dear Salette and arranged in a note-book. A page of this note-book, covered in snowdrops and bearing the inscription: *Precious Flowers* caught my attention.

‘Where did you pick these flowers, pray, Sister Mary of the Cross?’ I asked.

(24) When she left Corenc, the Bishop had first sent her to the sisters of Saint-Vincent de Paul in Valence. She only stayed there a while and then returned to Corps where the climate seemed better suited to her.

"Close to the fountain, the closest I could get. It was very cold that day. I had to scratch at the snow with my nails to get at the dear flowers ..."

"Give the book to Mademoiselle, Sister Mary of the Cross," said the Mother Superior.

"Oh! I wouldn't give it away for the whole of Napoleon's empire!"

"But for the love of the Holy Virgin, you wouldn't give it away?"

"If I had that note-book, dear sister," resumed Mlle des Brûlais, "I would show it to the whole world as firm proof that you are still convinced about the Apparition of the Most Holy Virgin on the hillside of La Salette, since you call the flowers that grow there "precious"."

"Ah! If I am convinced about the Apparition?! I would vouch for it even if they killed me, not in one blow, but little by little!"

"How were you able to bring yourself to leave that dear mountain where you saw Mary?"

"Ah! She wasn't there anymore! She had gone and left us orphans ..."

The Mother Superior returned to the attack,

"Come, Sister Mary of the Cross, be generous and let the note-book go; make this small sacrifice ..."

"It's not a small sacrifice, it's a big one ... But what do you want me to do, dear Mademoiselle, to give you my precious note-book? Well, there we are, then. But let me take one page out ... Which one shall I cut out? Not this one, do you think? For I believe this one is more dear to you than the others (she pointed to the page covered with snowdrops). Very well, I'll take another one ... There!"

DEPARTURE

Three days later, (20th September, 1854), Mlle des Brûlais, quite beside herself, wrote to her friend of the new "event" of the day:

"Sister Mary of the Cross is leaving France, and within a few days, the shepherd-girl will be living in England! For how long, I do not know. But she left this morning for Grenoble accompanied by Messrs. Chambon, Gérin, Reverend Father Burnoud (Superior of the Missionaries of La Salette) and Archbishop Newsham (25). This departure was so unexpected, so hurried, that I am utterly bewildered by it ...

"It was only after the celebration (of the 8th anniversary of the Apparition) that the poor child learned of the trip planned for her. At the time when she was about to leave La Salette, yesterday evening, Father Burnoud called her to him and acquainted her with the letter from Bishop

(25) Archbishop Newsham, an English Roman Catholic priest, a prelate of His Holiness, had come on a pilgrimage to La Salette. The sisters of Providence had given him Melanie as a guide, a few days before the 19th September.

Ginoulhiac which permitted Archbishop Newsham to take away Sister Mary of the Cross ... provided that she agreed to it, herself. Her agreement was promptly given. Nevertheless, she said, she would have preferred to go back to her beloved community of Providence at Corenc, as she had requested on several occasions of her bishop, and again quite recently in a most humble and imploring letter which she told me about. But rather than live amid the visits and distractions of Corps, she preferred to leave France entirely ..."

Archbishop Newsham is delighted to take away Sister Mary of the Cross, for he hopes the presence of the privileged child to whom Mary has spoken may contribute to the conversion of his country.

In the rest of her letter, which she finished the next day, Mlle des Brûlais paints for her friend a last picture of Melanie on the mountain.

"The caravan had left Corps at dusk the day before the celebrations. From the village of Dorcières onward, the fading light made the unpractised walk hazardous for the pilgrims." Mlle des Brûlais was filled with a great fear, she suffered from vertigo. She writes,

"Sister Mary of the Cross was our Providence. She walked ahead, showing us with the greatest of care the paths to follow and the ones to avoid. She was charming to everyone and we made our way up cheerfully behind her."

The next day saw a brief farewell, then a speedy departure. Exile ... She was poor, without means of supporting herself, an outcast from her family, an outcast from the convent where she seemed, however, to have an appointed place, banished from her native diocese, she is handed over—and obediently she hands herself over, abandoned, as if with her eyes closed, to the foreign prelate who is taking her away.

DESPITE HERSELF, she is now plunged into the life of wandering which from that day on will be hers.

DARLINGTON

Melanie's stay in England lasted six years. From September, 1854 to September, 1860.

These are obscure years, on which little light is thrown by too few documents. These are dark years, dotted and clouded with misunderstanding. Melanie, with the terseness that is so dear to her, is sparing with details about herself. Extracts from the Archives of the Carmel of Darlington which have been consulted so far, are even more brief (26).

And we must be content with this. It is impossible to give a proper account based on a few anecdotes which, from that point onward, were told about Melanie, passed on freely from convent to convent. Sister Mary of the Cross

(26) Extracts from the Archives of the Priory of the Carmel of Darlington, conveyed to Miss Natalie Bevenot, of Clifton near Bristol, and translated by her into French (manuscript).

is said to have been afflicted by a strange illness whose hidden cause was that nail-covered belt which she has worn, in effect, for fourteen years, she admits this herself (autobiography). But now it is no longer a belt, now it's a thick iron chain. It has become deeply encrusted in her flesh. On the command of the Holy Virgin, one evening when Sister Mary of the Cross is alone in the chapel, this chain crashes to the floor (27). Another miracle—while at the Carmel of Darlington, Sister Mary of the Cross is said to have been struck blind, and, at the bedside of a lay sister who had just died, by way of proof that the sister was on her way to Paradise, she is said to have regained her sight instantly. On the other hand, she is said to have had mysterious dealings with Cardinal Manning and a secret enquiry is said to have been conducted into her stay in England.

The latter is denied by Melanie. Over the rest, she is silent.

These little legends have but one interest—to demonstrate the two opposing tides of opinion around Melanie; one seeking to exalt, the other aiming to make her suspect in the eyes of ecclesiastical authority. She is a sign of contradiction.

The extracts from the Darlington Archives note:

"There was at first question of Sister Mary of the Cross founding a house of an active order in this country." Melanie merely writes,

"I spent my first few days in England visiting catholic and protestant churches and colleges (seminaries). Then I went to Carmel House, near Darlington ..." That is all (to Father Combe, 29th April 1899).

Archbishop Newsham was a doctor of Theology and dean of the college of Saint-Cuthbert at Ushaw in Cumberland. He had made his pilgrimage to La Salette with another university prelate, Doctor Smith, of Penrith. Did they see Father Sibillat? They probably did. Father Seignoux, parish priest of La Sarthe, who made his pilgrimage the same year, 1854, and tells of having discussed philosophy with them, saw him too. It is possible that they may have had, through Father Sibillat, some idea of the Rule which the Bishop of Grenoble had recently rejected, and that it may have occurred to them to attempt, with the help of Sister Mary of the Cross to found an institution which would contribute to the conversion of England. In letting her visit colleges, were they in search of an establishment adaptable to a new religious and apostolic life? Or were they simply revisiting, in passing on their way home, people and places of their acquaintance?

Whatever the case, any plan imagined by Archbishop Newsham was no sooner conceived than dropped, and, after a few days, he himself broke with Melanie. It seems that in making her leave the diocese of Grenoble and taking her far away from France, he had accomplished his task.

(27) An echo of this story is set down in the personal note-book of Mother Thérèse de Maximy, of Providence at Corenc, but not from Melanie herself, unlike the rest of the contents of the note-book.

"The ecclesiastical gentlemen arrived with her"—according to the Archives of the Carmel (28)—"before going north to their homes. She was so ill that it was decided she had better stay with our chaplain, where she put on the habit of Providence which she had changed out of for the journey."

Darlington (in Durham) was, for the two ecclesiastics from Cumberland the last stage of their journey. They continued on their way the next morning.

For Melanie, it was in the first place, as we remember, for health reasons that she left Corenc and then had a change of climate. It is for her to rest, out of charity, that she is left at Darlington.

The chaplain of the Carmelites, a secular priest, Mr. Brown, shows her hospitality. On grounds of propriety, he prefers her to wear religious dress. No-one asks themselves if, as, in fact she is no longer a novice of the Providence at Corenc, she still has the right to wear a habit. But everyone is happy, appearances have been kept up, and Melanie confirms her persevering adherence to God—to whom she clings above all else, and whom she seeks above all else—to be maintained while alive and strong by all possible means on a **A PATH SHE DID NOT CHOOSE**.

The close proximity of the Carmel provides one of these means.

"She often would come to our grill, and as she looked so unwell, permission was obtained from Bishop Hogarth for her to enter the enclosure and be attended to. This was the end of October 1854. Soon after, she expressed a strong desire to become a Carmelite. After a few deliberations, this was accepted and she took the habit on the 23rd February 1855. She made her profession the following year."

Melanie relates the same facts as the Archives of the Carmel report here, but in a different way (29):

"Nearly every day I was invited by these good sisters to come to the grill of their parlour to pass the hour of recreation with them. It is quite natural that these holy girls of Saint Theresa could speak of nothing but the Good Lord. If only I had learnt to love Him! One day when I was in the parlour as usual, I felt ill and lost consciousness. Immediately the bell was rung to summon the chaplain who sent a request to the Bishop that he authorise my entering the enclosure to be attended to. When my senses came back to me, I found myself on a bed in a small room, surrounded by nuns (30).

"In short from that day on I remained inside the convent, without paying

(28) The Carmel of Darlington, first founded at Lierre (Holland) for young English Catholic girls, moved from Belgium to England in 1794, firstly to St. Helens (Auckland), secondly to Cockenhalla, then finally to Darlington. It was one of the first three English Carmels. In 1854, it had not been in Darlington for very long.

(29) Letter to Father Combe, dated 29th April 1899.

(30) At the end of this letter, Father Combe noted that the fainting, of which there is no other example in Melanie's life and which must have lasted quite a long time (they were talking about the Good Lord) is similar to a trance. Her adjudged morbid state would seem to result from mystical phenomena which arouse the nuns' curiosity.

too much attention to what was to become of me. I was later urged to become a Carmelite, at least to take the habit, as, they told me, that did not bind me to anything. I was a postulant for a month, then I took the holy habit. For me, a sinner, it was too much, despite that most agreeable way of life. At last, the moment came when I was to take holy vows. Terrified by so great an action, and also knowing I had a mission to accomplish, I said, without giving an explanation, that I did not feel (sic) to make my profession. I asked to remain a novice, and as that could not be, all that was left was to go back into the world.

"After a few days I was told that Bishop Ginoulhiac had written, saying that if ever I returned to France, I would be excommunicated from his whole diocese. Undoubtedly in my interest, I was strongly advised, even pressed, to make my profession. On the 24th February, 1856, I took my vows—I confess, not the vow of enclosure, God alone knew that—and He also knows that I have belonged to Him for a long, long time. Enough of that."

This must have been a mental reservation which cost her dear, the woman who throughout the rest of her life showed a rather brutal frankness and who wrote,

"I am not of the race of bats. I love the sun and the light of day" (31).

The Archives of the Carmel show that,

"Due to her ignorance of the English language, the noviciate of Sister Mary of the Cross was not all it might have been." Far from delaying her profession, however, they press her. Her health, which is repeatedly said to be poor, is no obstacle at all. The threat of excommunication from Bishop Ginoulhiac does not cause anyone to mistrust her, either at the Carmel or at the Bishop's residence. In the end, Melanie's behaviour is far from characteristic.

Over this she never shows and has never shown any remorse, not even regret, not even a scruple. She felt none at the time and never did feel any.

When, twenty-four years later, while living in Cannes with her elderly mother, she visits the parish priest of Cannet, Father Boris—known locally as the priest of Ars of the diocese—her stay there is lengthy.

"When she had finished", noted Mother Mary Eynard (32) who accompanied Melanie,

"Father Boris appeared preoccupied while Melanie was calm and untroubled. As he accompanied us a long way up the road, they were still talking. When he stopped to take his leave of us, he said to her,

"But still! Did you take your vows?"

"Yes, but I protested in the eyes of the Lord!"

(31) Letter to Mr. Schmid of the 16th July 1895.

(32) The prioress of the Camaldolian nuns of La Seyne (Var), when still a young girl had been placed with Melanie by her cousin Mr. Antoine Carlevau, an independent school-teacher in Cannes where he had taken an apartment for Melanie. She is still alive to this day and has written her memoirs.

That was all. And, at these words, the priest seemed relieved of a great burden. I had moved a little way off (out of discretion). I saw her kneel to receive his blessing ...”

The Carmel is no more explicit. Only the facts are there. And seen in this way, from the outside, they remain puzzling.

It is often thus, is it not, when a supernatural calling is involved? Down what detours must it sometimes pass?

Was it the times, so unstable in its social institutions after three revolutions? Between 1848 and 1900 examples abound of spiritual crossroads to which the servers of divine works come, with surprising turn-about.

In 1852, Father Marie Alphonse Ratisbonne, after ten years of study and work in the Society of Jesus heard an urgent call from the depths of his soul to give himself to the works of Sion and one morning he ran away from his college on rue de Vaugirard, leaving his brothers stupefied, and his director, Father de Ravigan, in doubt and concern over the course he had taken.

In 1856, the Blessed Pierre-Julien Eymard, who had already left the secular clergy of the diocese of Grenoble to become a member of the newly-founded Society of Mary, ministered there fruitfully for seventeen years and then, after a painful struggle, broke away, until, dispensed from his vows, he was free to devote his last years to the founding of the order of the Blessed Sacrement. Closer to us, in 1897, Father Charles de Foucauld, a Professed of La Trappe—despite all the efforts of his Superiors to hold him back and the long delays forced upon him, begged for his liberation and left his order to devote himself to a life of humility and abjection at the gate of the Poor Clares of Nazareth.

The founder of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Mother Mary of the Passion, was not only a Professed, but a Provincial, in the Indies, of the nuns of the order of the Atoners. There still hangs a cloud of uncertainty over her break with a hallowed, beloved past and her blessed rise into a renewed activity.

Painful surprises, stinging regrets, restrained exasperations and fretful suppositions surround such sudden changes, which are so difficult to understand and even more so to explain. Holy Church, nevertheless, in the light of the Spirit of God, accepts and holds them close, maternally.

One of the most striking cases is that of Sister Mary of Jesus on the Cross. This little Palestinian girl had come through all sorts of adventures, to the Carmel of Pau, and was still only a postulant there when she received a revelation, and an order of some kind from above, to undertake the founding of a Carmel in Mangalore. It was to this Carmel that she was to belong. She departed for the Indies with the first nucleus of founder-members, and made her profession at Mangalore amid general rejoicing, and in inexpressible happiness. It was the 21st November 1871.

Only ten days had passed when the atmosphere around her suddenly changed. Her prioress, and confidante, Mother Elie, had died on arrival in the

Indies. Unable, and not wishing to reveal the secrets of her mystical life to anyone but her confessor or her bishop, the young professed girl was the target for inquisitive people who spied on her raptures, violated the mystery of her stigmata and suspected in her a spirit of pride and delusion. Her ecstasies are acted, her stigmata are nothing but wounds she makes herself with a knife ... Soon the test was too much, without her habitual confessor, and as a willing sacrifice, she prayed for deliverance from the stigmata and the ecstasies. She was granted her prayer. But an irresistible impulse makes her leave the enclosure. Is it the devil? Is she possessed? This is confirmed in a statement by the Bishop of Mangalore to the Bishop of Pau, in which he testifies to the effect that every miraculous event in the life of Sister Mary of Jesus on the Cross was inspired by the devil.

In no way, whatever the case, must she remain attached to Mangalore. After several painful months, her Superiors sent her back to Pau, where she was soon rehabilitated. She later founded the Carmel of Bethlehem, and there she died at the age of thirty-three, worn out with suffering, an offering in expiation.

Melanie, to whom Canon de Brandt had made her known, writes to him, saying (33), that Sister Mary of Jesus on the Cross is a great saint in the eyes of God. She herself knows well that divine paths are not those of humans and wherever the Cross is, there is necessarily obscurity and scandal in the minds of the common people.

Meanwhile, time was passing in Darlington. The year of 1856 was approaching, the year when, according to the order of the Holy Virgin, the secret should be divulged. This was the MISSION of the shepherd-girl of La Salette. Everything hung on this. The Pope, who was the first to be told the Secret, was well aware of this, himself. Had he been informed, he would have liberated her from enclosure. But he was far away, and inaccessible to the lowly shepherd-girl. He could only be informed through her Superiors. And the Bishop of Darlington had no more idea than the prioress of the carmel of what was going on inside Melanie. The Archives merely note the disappointment and grief which is caused in the convent by the if not inexplicable, at least misunderstood agitation of "poor Sister Mary of the Cross". This is the beginning of 1858.

"... Her spirit became troubled. Her life here was too monotonous, and it is possible that her weakening spirit longed for the life of excitement she led before coming here."

"1859: A good Redemptorist hoped to do her some good in the course of a retreat which he preached in 1859. The results, however, disappointed us."

"1860: Our hope of seeing a happy transformation, Providence seemed to have kept in store for us when it sent to us at the end of 1859 one of its

(33) Letter to de Brandt, le Cannet, 18th June, 1889.

favourite servants. Then in February 1860 there came a Passionist; but the results were temporary only."

"September 1860. Poor Sister Mary of the Cross became more and more unbalanced; and a visit from her sister Marie only worsened matters. In September, she threw out of the window sheets of paper on which certain phrases were to be found which passers-by must have interpreted as complaints that she was being held by force in the convent. Bishop Hogarth came to the convent, and at her request, he granted permission for her to return to her mother. A secular priest, a choir sister, and a postulant accompanied her as far as Marseilles where her mother was living. A Mr. Grille (actually Geille) (34) and his wife received them with kindness. Mr. Grille wrote to us to let us know that the Holy Father had not liberated her from her vows, but was permitting her to live outside the Order and in other convents (not enclosed)."

Melanie, for her part, wrote to Father Combe (35),

"What I can say in all truth, is that absolutely nobody made me leave the Carmel of Darlington. I, and I alone, wanted to leave. The Bishop of Darlington, as well as the sisters of the Carmel did all they could to deter me. This fight lasted over a year, the convent wanted me to stay, and I wanted to go. They were still obstinate in wanting to keep me against my will. So, in exasperation, I devised a plan ... Straight away the Bishop of Darlington told me that if I wanted to go back into the world, I must submit to him a written request; which I did immediately. That is how I got out of the Carmel.

"That enquiry of a Father Recollet is a wilful fabrication. There was no enquiry. The Holy Father Pius IX most kindly replied to people who would have had me stay in a cloistered convent:

"She could not fulfill her MISSION in a cloistered convent."

"As for Cardinal Manning, I neither saw nor knew him and I have no idea why he is involved in a private matter between the local Bishop and myself. It was without condition that the Bishop of Darlington authorised my return to France. I do not know whether or not he could have secularized me. Whatever the case may be, he must have known that it was his responsibility. Pius IX dispensed me from enclosure, from divine office and from everything which was not compatible with my new situation. But my vows were left to me, and moreover, this was my wish, too. I heard it said, however, (I cannot remember if it was by Bishop Zola or Bishop Petagna) that I had been released from my vows. In any case, I observe them as closely as possible ...

"I do not like to think of those two sad years (36) that I spent in the darkest obscurity of my life. I give thanks to Divine Mercy which supported me and kept me from going mad; yes, mad. Everlasting glory be unto our most loving

(34) Mr. Geille, 68, boulevard de la Madelaire, Marseilles.

(35) Letters of the 4th and 7th April, 1897.

(36) 1858 to 1860.

Jesus who supports the most abandoned souls. I will tell you, my reverend Father, just this small fact, you will judge from the rest.

"The Community had sent for a priest to preach the retreat. During the ten-day retreat, the nuns were to confess to him. One day, after my confession, this good and holy priest asked me,

"Has it ever happened that in remembering someone or something, you cannot remember if you heard such and such a thing, or dreamed it?"

"Yes, once, when on a journey, I saw someone I thought I recognised, but I couldn't remember where I had met this person, or if it had just been a dream."

"Aha!" he said, "there's a real sign of madness, and since then you have become completely mad, yes you are mad, quite mad." There upon he took his leave; and the nuns who had taken the lessons of this good priest, treated me as my sins deserved. Thanks be to God."

Her mother had come to find work in Marseilles. She had entered into the service of Mr. Geille, a respectable businessman, a fine catholic, and probably one of those private agents of whom, due to the situation of the Church in Italy at the time, the Pope would make use as the need arose.

And so, to ease the worries of the Darlington Carmelites, and to settle the matter for good, he made known the papal will as to the witness of La Salette.

The episode was at an end.

MARSEILLES AND CEPHALONIA

Melanie had disembarked at Dieppe on the 26th September 1860 (passport stamp). Two days later, she was in Marseilles. She was welcomed into the home of Mr. Geille (68, boulevard de la Madeleine). But under what conditions and by what right did she reside there? She could not stay for long.

Mr. Geille had a perfect sense of what was fitting. He took Melanie's case on the spot to Reverend Father Barthez of the Society of Jesus, who had founded and directed in Marseilles the Congregation of the Sisters of Compassion. This Institute was designed to take in orphan girls and make them into servants. It also took free boarders, in which capacity Melanie was admitted.

At the start it seemed that nothing was known about her, or very little. She kept herself to herself, moreover, reserved, prudent. As soon as she feels she is alone and protected from indiscrete eyes, she begins to write out the "Secret", in order to be in a position to pass it on to those whom Providence will send to her to hear and reveal it. The five sheets of the first draft (referred to in the diary of Father Combe, 7th November 1902) date from this period.

Melanie is now twenty-nine. She wears a costume whose model she was shown in the "Sight" which accompanied, on the holy mountain, the dictation of the Rule of the Apostles of the Last Days: a black dress of simple cut, with

a small white collar, a large black cape, a small bonnet, also black with a white border, which is covered with a veil when outdoors.

"The religious habit is merely a means to an end," she will write to canon Brandt, 14th April 1884, ... "in ordinary clothes one can go fishing without being noticed."

Her gifts of apostleship were, no doubt, noticeable enough to attract the interest of the founder, and the trust of the community. Either for this reason, or because there was a lack of staff, or quite simply to let her pay for her board and lodging, her services were soon in demand. She was even trusted with some important duties. She took the catechism classes for the lay novices.

"No doubt", she writes (Letter to Father Combe, 29th April, 1899.), "this was a subtle means of obliging me to improve my knowledge of our holy religion." One day, she is asked to replace an ill sister in her class; so now she is a school teacher.

"That isn't all there is to it", Father Barthez tells her, "now you will have to take the habit ..."

"At this", she says, "due to my unworthiness, I raised a few difficulties. That evening the founder father came back and insisted that he had no intention of committing me to anything, that it was only a borrowed habit etc, etc ... When I saw him so troubled at having no replacement for the sister who was ill, I accepted without any commitment." (To Father Combe, 29th April 1899.)

The Congregation was in possession, on the island of Cephalonia in Greece, of an orphanage which was going fast adrift and suffering from the scandalous behaviour of an Italian chaplain, who was suspect and had been exiled from Rome by Pope Pius IX. The Superiors decided to send out the Assistant of the Community, Mother of the Presentation, and to assist her, they sent Melanie along, too: an unexpected mission indeed. As with the replacing of the schoolmistress, was there no-one else to whom to entrust this adventurous task? And did Melanie seem to be the only one capable of carrying it out? Was it necessary to keep her out of France, as may be understood from a short line in the Darlington archives, which hints, quite improbably, that the Pope had forbidden her residence in France or Italy? Or did they simply want to remove her from the Marseilles institution, where, unknowingly and unintentionally she was perhaps having too great an influence?

One thing alone is certain, she did manage to rescue the orphanage from the hands of its unworthy director, to clear up his embarrassing position, and to transfer him to a community of Compassionists, on Corfu. She had departed from Marseilles with Mother of the Presentation on 21st November 1861.

"We arrived in the middle of the night," she relates to Father Combe who noted it down in his diary on the 12th November 1902. "There was a com-

municating door between the girls' dormitory and that of the boys. I refused to go to bed before it had been shut. The chaplain replied that it would be seen to the next day, but I wouldn't listen to his reasons ... planks were nailed across the door."

"You discussed the matter with him in Italian?"

"There wasn't much choice!"

"You knew a few words of Italian?"

"I didn't know a single word, but there wasn't any choice!"

From this moment, she is able to write and speak Italian fluently, and more accurately even than French. Her accent was so pure that she was taken for an Italian, and even a Tuscan. She was motivated by a concern to do her duty well with regard to the children, some of whom were Italian, some Greek, and whose lessons she took. Because of this, she soon had an adequate grasp of modern Greek, too.

The mission lasted twenty-one months. Having left Greece, not, Melanie notes, without visiting Athens and its ancient monuments, the two travellers arrived back in Marseilles on the 14th August 1863.

Great changes had taken place at the Compassion. Father Barthez had died, and had been replaced by Father Calage. He saw Melanie, discouraged her from re-entering the Compassion and arranged for her to enter, provisionally, the Carmel of rue du Renard.

After a few months, however, she went back to the Compassion.

An Italian bishop, driven from his diocese and from Italy by the Revolution had found refuge there. His name was Bishop Petagna, bishop of Castellamare di Stabia, "my good, holy bishop", as Melanie says of him.

Bishop Petagna seems a pathetic figure of a persecuted priest. His profound faith, his gentle piety and his tender devotion to the Madonna predispose him to believe in La Salette, and to understand, and love, the carrier of its Message. He had suffered much from the threats of the Carbonari and from the inadequacies of a clergy which was often ill-informed and sometimes so blinded by masonic propaganda that they were far from ardently in favour of the spiritual reform which the "Secret" demanded and which was specified in the Rule. He lived in evangelical poverty. As the whole of the considerable ecclesiastical wealth of his diocese had been confiscated, the Italian Government paid him in compensation an annuity of 30,000 lire. It wasn't much, and everything went to the poor. During the last few days of his life, Melanie relates, "we had to borrow to make him some beef-tea ... (37).

Melanie, who spoke Italian, was therefore quite naturally appointed to attend to the needs of the exiled prelate. Their relationship was soon one of father and daughter in every way, with a quite supernatural character.

They became even closer when, after the death of the founder and more

(37) Letter to Mr. Schmid, 3rd April, 1895.

recently of the Mother founder, the Compassion of Marseilles no longer afforded, peaceful asylum.

"It's all a long story," Melanie recalls (38), "my Lord Bishop Petagna had much to suffer. After five years he found himself obliged to leave, despite the fact that Italy was still in revolution. Two days before his departure, he said to me,

"I foresee that it will be impossible for you to stay here. I am obliged to leave without knowing if I can re-enter my diocese ... I will tell you now, that if I am able to re-enter my diocese and you cannot stay on here, you must write to me, and my whole diocese will open its arms to greet you ...' A few months later (Bishop Petagna left Marseilles in November 1866), I wrote to him. My departure was delayed.

The former Assistant, who was with Melanie in Greece, Mother of the Presentation, asked if she might accompany her, and, Melanie says,

"She went with me to Italy, against the official order of her Mother Superior ... and truly I needed her—to exercise my patience! I have so little patience!" (39).

Before she could leave, however, she must await the reply of Bishop Petagna. Before it had arrived, and, as she says, without ever knowing the reason why, Melanie was turned out of the Compassion. Where could she go? Her mother had returned from Corps. Escorted by Mother of the Presentation, she went up to Corps, walked up to La Salette for a few days, then thanks to the consideration of Father Calage, she found refuge at Voiron, at the Visitation Convent. She stayed there a few weeks.

Voiron is in the diocese of Grenoble. Bishop Ginoulhiac may, perhaps, have been concerned at the unexpected return of the shepherdess. He hurriedly wrote to Bishop Petagna to speed up his reply.

He took it upon himself to leave Melanie as a companion, this mother of the Presentation, who had broken away from her community. He said he would settle the matter with Rome and told her she might depart without delay and without scruples (40).

In short, the two women left France for Naples on the 20th May, 1867 (41).

(38) Letter to Mr Schmid, 30th March, 1895.

(39) "I did Novena after Novena so that the Good Lord might deliver me from that creature... Accustomed as she was in Italy to fulsome flattery, when she arrived in France (after 17 years of community life), she could not tolerate a single word my aging mother uttered, and wished to go off and find her Sisters. I let her go, thinking that she wouldn't stay there long, being accustomed to drink... if she is still alive, she will be in Naples... I have not written to her since." (Letter to Mr. Schmid, 30th March 1895.)

(40) Diary of Father Combe, 12th November 1902.

(41) Date on the passport of Miss Melanie Calvat presented to the French Consulate at Newcastle, 20th September 1860. Melanie had noted this date in pencil on the passport presented to her by the French Consulate at Newcastle on 21st September, 1860.

CASTELLAMARE DI STABIA

This time, Melanie was setting off on what was to be a long exile. She was to live seventeen years at Castellamare di Stabia (1867–1884).

Castellamare di Stabia is situated on the east coast of the Gulf of Naples, facing Vesuvius, close to the remains of the ancient city of Stabia which was buried under lava at the same time as Pompei, its neighbouring city. Its inhabitants enjoyed the most delightful of climates, in some of the most beautiful countryside in the world. But when Melanie arrived, it was in the midst of political upheaval and religious war.

Since the entry of Garibaldi into Naples (September 1860), since the fall and exile of the King of Naples and the Two Sicilies, and the declaration of the Kingdom of Italy with a monarch from the House of Savoy, southern Italy had remained in a state of agitation from popular movements bringing the “red shirts” and the “black shirts” into conflict. These violent times were not yet ended.

When Bishop Petagna called Melanie to his diocese, he promised to respect her freedom. His first action, however, while he himself was going to see the Pope, was to shut her up in a convent (42).

“The feeling of the Pope (was) that I should not remain in a cloistered convent I had not been in cloisters and yet I was encloistered at that time, that is to say while Bishop Petagna was journeying to Rome. When I arrived in Naples, everything was in revolutionary upheaval, or rather overt religious persecution hidden under a revolutionary veil by Garibaldi and his followers. And so Bishop Petagna, knowing that I was a little imprudent and that, had I been at liberty, I would not have gone out of my way to avoid speaking to all those devilish Free Masons, decided to put me in a non-cloistered convent, which was, however, cloistered as far as I was concerned since I could neither go out nor receive visitors.”

Her “enclosure” did not last long. The Garibaldians withdrew having outlawed a certain number of priests and nuns. Comparative peace was restored, and as soon as he returned from Rome, Bishop Petagna installed Melanie in Castellamare. She was installed under his official patronage, with the approval of the Holy Father. Indeed, Melanie writes to Mr. Schmid (1st April, 1898):

“What I am about to tell you is the whole truth. In 1867, my Lord Bishop Petagna went to Rome, and in the audiences he had with his Holiness Pius IX, he spoke to him of me, and how I was placed in his diocese etc . . . , etc . . . The Holy Father told him that I must not remain in a cloistered convent and that I must remain free to accomplish my MISSION. Bishop Petagna told me this himself and told other people who have since repeated it to me.

“I was granted the grace of hearing holy mass every day of the year in my

(42) Letter to Mr. Schmid, 8th April 1896.

own home and many other graces. Glory be to God, author of all that is good."

And so she is received with honour and placed in a privileged position. Her Bishop finds her accommodation at the Ruffo Palace. She has at her disposal a whole floor of this spacious house. She has a "work-room" and a private chapel served by the chaplain provided by Bishop Petagna (he is an Italian Redemptorist, Father Fusco). From her promenade-sized terrace, the view encompasses the gulf, the sea, Vesuvius and the surrounding countryside. When Bishop Fava of Grenoble comes to Castellamare, he is overwhelmed to see the shepherd-girl of La Salette in such surroundings.

"His Lordship asked us who we had as neighbours. I replied that we were alone."

"Oh! What princely lodgings!" (43).

Bishop Petagna provided for everything. Indeed, he looked upon Melanie as an instrument of apostleship which Providence had miraculously granted him in the tragic crisis which the Church was going through in Italy. He later said to Bishop Fava, in her presence.

"It's the Good Lord who sent me Sister Mary of the Cross, and I give thanks to Him every day."

As far as Melanie's health permitted, he entrusted her with a small school for young girls. Canon Annibale di Francia met one of these girls after Melanie's death, in 1906. She was called Virginia Bonifacio. She was a well-bred, well-mannered girl. She had been the pupil of Sister Mary of the Cross up to Confirmation, at Castellamare.

"This is what she told me":

"Many people of every class of society came to visit Melanie. She would receive some and others she would turn away; for the latter, there was no way they would ever be accepted. This came out later; in her spirit she could see that they were the victims of a vain curiosity which made them mock the things of God ... She was very strict with herself and very mortified. At the mere sight of her, I would feel the salutary emotion of a holy terror of the judgement of God ... She used to say to us,

"When we eat, we must be unconcerned as to whether it is bread, nuts, potatoes, oil or wine etc ..." (44)

Bishop Petagna held her in great esteem for her holiness.

A kind of little community formed around her, and freely, affectionately, her spiritual gifts were put into practice there, with sufficient success for her Bishop to entrust her with the teaching of the contemplative sisters under his jurisdiction.

"As I told you, my most dear Mr. Schmid," Melanie writes, 22nd March

(43) Letter to Father Rigaux, 28th. February, 1904.

(44) Letter to Father Combe from Canon Annibale copied down by Combe in his diary with other memories, 3rd July 1903.

1895, "I never actually entered any convent, but I often visited the Carmelites or the Poor Clares. A certain number of them desired reform (45), and they had obtained permission from Bishop Petagna for me to go and have some conferences on religious life with them ..." and in the same letter, "Bishop Petagna founded an order of nuns. He wished me to go and teach them about religious life for a few months. I went there every morning and afternoon, but I never spent the night there ..."

What were these conferences? Did she write anything about them? It is unlikely, for Canon Annibale or Father Combe would have collected the notes. She must have spoken out of charity and with the effusion of that indelible memory, as she commented upon the Rule she had received on the day of the Apparition, as the example, the canon of all religious life.

She considers the Rule as less of an actual ruling or a new code, than the recalling, the renewal of the spirit which must animate every life which is truly devoted to the service of God.

Monks and nuns, secular priests, lay persons devoted to the salvation of souls, every man and every woman, in every order, in all walks of life, can and must receive from the Rule, and draw from its constant and active contemplation—if it is done with a good grace—a new sap of piety and apostleship.

Too much attention to the distinction of dress, of habits, of external detail makes people mistake the shell for the kernel, and does nothing but inspire petty rivalry. When three nuns later leave La Salette in an attempt to found, for the first time, the Order of the Mother of God and to live according to Her Rule, Melanie exhorts them, in order to be more readily acceptable to the local Bishop, to marry into a great spiritual family, rich in resources, and join the Third Order of Dominicans. She confirms that its observances are perfectly in line with the Rule and even support the practice of it.

"If the Sisters wished to be received by the Third Order of St. Dominic, as I wrote to them at the time, it would have been advantageous to them, and, in the public eye, they would not appear isolated and left to themselves. They would be Tertiaries in communal life, observing the Rule of our sweet Mother Mary ... of our Tender Mother, garlanded with roses, symbolising the Rosary given to St. Dominic ..." A little later, sorry that the Sisters had not taken her advice, Melanie says,

"They would have been under the Superiors ... they could have done good with more freedom as Tertiaries in an approved Order" (46).

She, herself, undoubtedly already a member of the Confraternity of the Most Holy Rosary, had been received into the Third Order of St. Dominic. Proof of this is given in the announcement of her death in the Bulletin of the

(45) reform..." Here, the Carmelites are real ladies; each has her servant to serve her and cook for her, because they do not lead a communal life, each is an owner of some kind, and they know nothing of religious life." (from a letter to Canon de Brandt, 2nd April 1877)

(46) Letters to Canon de Brandt, 7th January and 15th May 1897.

Most Holy Rosary, (handed on to Father Rigaux, parish priest of Argoeuvres, by Reverend Father Sanfelice, of the Preaching Brothers of Amiens, on the 14th March 1905), in the "obituaries", and in these terms,

"Melanie Calvat (of La Salette), Tertiary of St. Dominic, at Altamura (Italy)."

When and where and through whom did she join? It was probably around 1880, in any case between 1880 and 1890; perhaps at Naples, through a Father Sanfelice who once came to say mass in her private chapel at Castellamare, perhaps at Ville di Pompei, where Father Cecchini lived, a friend of Father Fusco, Melanie's faithful chaplain, and also known to her Confessor, Bishop Zola. With the present limited information, it is impossible to make an accurate statement.

Bishop Zola had been confessing Melanie since 1868. Overwhelmed by work and then by illness, too, Bishop Petagna had been forced to give up regular confession and he had chosen as Melanie's confessor and director, Father Zola. Salvatore Luigi, of the counts of Zola, wore the white tunic and the "cappa" of the regular canons of the Lateran of the Abbey of Santa-Maria di Pie di Grotta. In 1868 he was forty-six years old. Prior, then, in 1870, abbot of Pie di Grotta, he taught the seminarians and the pupils of the College attached to the Abbey. Every year this abbey would bring back to its sanctuary at the western end of the Bay of Naples, at the foot of the Pausilippe, the enthusiastic crowd of Neapolitans. And far beyond the monastery, pilgrims spread the fame of its eloquent and holy abbot.

In 1874, Pius IX named him Bishop of Ugento then in 1877, Bishop of Lecce, an important diocese in southern Italy and a "marian" city where every church, under various titles is dedicated to Our Lady. Abbot Zola suffered the break from a monastic life. But he was a priest who truly sacrificed himself for the salvation of souls. Of noble birth, very cultivated, a keen-witted theologian, he had the temperament of a poet and the taste of an artist.

In the diocese of Ugento, he saw to the restoration and rededication of the ancient sanctuary of the Madonna "de finibus terrae" high on the extreme tip of the Leuca head-land. At Lecce, his example and the quality of his sermons gave rise to a magnificent surge in sacerdotal recruitment at the Seminary. Jealously guarding the independance of the Church, he had refused to recognize the Italian government and his only income came from Peter's Pence. A great believer in mortification, he never slept in a bed and was content with a short nap in an armchair. A musician at heart, he took pleasure in standing in, sometimes, for the church organist, and, in moments of intimacy would improvise tunes on his harmonium, as a better means than the spoken word of giving voice to his mystical aspirations. His secretary and biographer, Bishop Chinatti, recounts how, a few hours before his death, and already dying, he opened up his piano and started playing, to help to celebrate divine mercy.

He died at Lecce on the 5th April 1898. The case for his beatification has been put forward to Rome.

For Melanie, he was a confidant and a friend. Like Bishop Petagna, he never ceased to encourage her to fulfill her mission.

A SHORT TRIP TO FRANCE

And yet, the great movement forward of history shook the foundations of not only the Church, but of Italy and France too. After the war of 1870-77, Melanie was anxious to visit her family and her homeland, and so made a short trip to France. She spent a few weeks at Corps, and went on a pilgrimage to La Salette (1877).

She returned to Castellamare saddened by the state of France, and convinced that it could not yet be on the holy mountain that the Rule which was dictated there, could be established in a foundation, to shine down on the people of the Holy Virgin.

A movement of expiation and atonement, however, was gathering force among French catholics; witness the vow of Montmartre, the great pilgrimage to the Holy Land. At La Salette, under the direction of Bishop Paulinier, the successor to Bishop Ginoulhiac to the See of Grenoble, a first national pilgrimage was organised in 1872. Pamphlets by Girard, and one by Father Bliard, which breathed new life into the evocation of the Apparition of 1846, and began to make the "Secret" known, were distributed among the clergy. (47)

Bishop Fava, who replaced Bishop Paulinier in 1875, at once considered the time right to draw attention to La Salette, and lent a little glamour to his sanctuary, and a little dash to his pilgrimages. He was a missionary bishop (returned from Martinique) of powerful build, a ringing voice, an imperious eloquence, and with his long hair pushed back, a most imposing figure.

He held the first general chapter of the small community of diocesan Missionaries which Bishop Bruillard had founded at La Salette. Bishop Ginoulhiac had not been able to decide whether to endow them with a Rule. Father Sibillat, who, as we recall, had conveyed to him several articles of Melanie's Rule, and without result, had withdrawn in 1858.

His fellow priest, Father Bossan, had resigned his post in 1858. The matter remained in abeyance and the missionaries themselves were divided on this essential question. Bishop Fava took the matter into his own hands, accepted the resignation of the Father Superior, Father Giraud, and drew up himself the plans for a constitution and for an apostolic college to be associated with the Institution of Missionaries.

(47) See bibliographical note in appendix.

THE RULE AND THE CONGRESS

In Castellamare, nothing was known of all this. But seeing the approach of the thirtieth anniversary of the Apparition (19th September 1846–1876), Melanie felt bound to give to the “Secret” the publicity which would reach the consciences of people, and give life to the evangelical directions in the Rule.

“I long,” she writes (48), “to see the beginnings of this Order which has been called upon to do so much good in the world ... I yearn ardently to see this Order of the Mother of God, and yet I can do nothing about it; on the contrary I see that I am an obstacle to all that is good, and my only achievement is to spoil everything ... All that is involved in setting up a house of nuns—I say this in all honesty—I am incapable on all accounts of doing something of this kind, quite incapable.” The applicants to this Order of the Apostles of the Last Days came to her, nevertheless, and nearly all were priests. Two or three joined Father Fusco to live, close to Melanie and inspired by her, a life of prayer, penance, and sacred study ...

“Bishop Petagna had authorised me”, she says later (49) “to begin the Institution of the Apostles of the Last Days. For these priests I took the first floor of the same palace that I lived in myself ...”

All was done, as she explains elsewhere, under the blessing and at the expense of the good Bishop of Castellamare. Bishop Zola kept in touch and even came to see the little group and spoke to Melanie about the foundation (26th June, 1877 (50)).

This was a beginning ...

Who were these first volunteers for the Institution? With the exception of Father Fusco, their names do not appear anywhere.

But passing travellers also stopped at the Ruffo Palace. And the more important among them may be identified by the way in which they formed a correspondence relationship with Melanie. Among the first was Father Bliard (from 1872, 3), then a little later Father Roubaud, who showed an interesting late development of his vocation. First a seminary teacher, then a priest in the diocese of Frejus, Melanie would have been able to meet him or hear of him in Marseilles. Then finally, on two occasions, an eminent figure, Canon de Brandt, of the Chapter of Amiens.

Melanie’s history had been disclosed to him by her former mistress of the novices at Providence of Corenc. The warnings of the “Secret”, and the spirit of the Rule appeared to be in his experience as a priest, an opportunity for

(48) Letters to Canon de Brandt, 2nd and 19th June, 1877.

(49) Letter to Mr. Schmid, 22nd March 1895.

(50) Letters to de Brandt, 18th June and 26th July 1877.

fruitful good works. In his tall and noble figure, Melanie believed she saw the Superior of the Foundation: She showed a deep respect for him. He would be able, she hoped, to draw and group around him choice recruits. At the same time as in Italy, the Institution would spring into life in France ...

Would they find the necessary site, surroundings and funds for the realisation of the project? Is it at this time that he made the trip to Castellamare? It is probable, but not certain. Father Ronjon came to offer his help.

"It is possible," Melanie writes to Canon de Brandt, now departed from Castellamare (this her first letter to him, 23rd March, 1877)," it is possible, from what I hear, that soon there may be a Foundation in France, and then, the noviciate could be taken there. A priest who owns a house and a sanctuary would like to make me a gift of them, and would also provide for the maintenance of two or three persons, on condition that I have a priest there to serve the sanctuary ... This good priest does not wish the matter to be discussed before the plans are fixed, but if we delay matters, I fear it might be given to some other congregation."

It was a discreet invitation to Canon de Brandt to begin dealings with Father Jean Ronjon.

Father Jean Ronjon was considered an eccentric, a charitable eccentric at that, but still an eccentric. An unattached priest of Châlon-sur-Saône, he had a long time ago made his own little niche apart in the clergy of the diocese of Autun. He lived the life of a hermit preferring above all else solitary prayer and the poor.

Thirty years previously, on the 19th September, 1846, he had been at prayer. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon. He saw a light, he felt himself filled with joy, and under the impetus of this joy, he offered himself and all his worldly goods to the service of the Mother of God. Shortly afterwards he learned that on the same day, at the same time, the Mother of God had appeared at La Salette. He doubled his prayers, started to do penance and began to save for an Institution to which he would, perhaps, be called, although he had no clear picture of it. Time passed. What had become of the witnesses of La Salette? No-one knew. The "Secret" and the "Rule" were still unrevealed. The priest decided to take action on the spot. Independant due to his personal fortune, he became the owner, in 1856, of an old priory at Châlon-sur-Saône, in a suburb of the Citadel. Everything was in ruins, except one tower which was still standing. The priest restored and decorated the chapel, and cleared out enough debris to make a small place to live. Upon the tower, in execution of a vow made by the ladies of Châlon at the time of the invasion of 1870, the Bishops of Autun authorised the erection of a statue of the Holy Virgin. The chapel was dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. Father Ronjon served it with a loving heart. This poor quarter of the Citadel is far from the parishes in the town. Labourers and lowly people would visit the sanctuary of the good father and would receive his spiritual and temporal

aid. He was well loved by them, but his way of life somehow estranged him from the ecclesiastical hierarchy in Châlon.

He was growing old, and the complete fulfillment of his vow and the future of his beloved chapel after his death were his greatest preoccupations.

When—actually where and from whom is unknown—he heard about the Rule of the Mother of God and the future Order of her Sons, the Apostles of the Last Days, he was very excited. He acquired more information, and managed to get in touch with the shepherd-girl witness of La Salette. Their acquaintance must have begun around 1874. Father Ronjon did not join the small band of priests at the Ruffo Palace. But soon, by a deed of transfer, executed and authenticated by a notary, dated 24th August 1878, he presented Melanie with his chapel and his living quarters, assuring her of an income sufficient to cover the maintenance of the property and the subsistence of one or two serving priests. All was designed, or so at least it seemed, to ensure a foundation in the near future. Although unwell, Bishop Petagna followed events with kindly concern. The Rule was sent to Rome, for examination. The opening actions of the new Pope Leo XIII seemed to augur well for the application. Melanie writes to Canon de Brandt, 26th October, 1878,

“In Rome, things could not be better, three cardinals have reached an agreement in favour (51). All we are waiting for is a letter from Bishop Petagna to ask an audience of the Holy Father to reveal to him the wishes of the Most Holy Virgin.”

At this time, Bishop Fava set off on his way. Here, since Melanie took the precaution of recording her account twice—in 1900 for Father Combe, parish priest of Diou, and in 1904, for Father Rigaux, parish priest of Argoeuvres—we need only follow her words (52).

“I had promised you that, if it is the Will of God, I would commit the account of my journey to Rome to paper, together with what led up to it, the “Congress” held in the name of the Holy Father by his Eminence Cardinal Ferrieri, prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, what was said there, my private audience with the Holy Father and what we said, my entry into the house of the Salesians (Nuns of the Order of the Visitation), then my departure and what followed.”

In the year of Grace 1878, in, I think, October, one morning after Holy Mass, Reverend Father Fusco told me he had read in a journal of the intention of Bishop Fava of Grenoble to go to Rome to gain the approval of his Rule for the Fathers and Sisters of La Salette. At this news, I said,

“To have my conscience clear, I shall quickly go and write down the Rule of the Most Holy Mother of God and send it to the Holy Father.”

(51) Cardinal Ferrier, prefect of the Holy Congregation, and Cardinals Guidi and Consolini.

(52) Here both texts are followed; variants are shown, and completed with letters.

“I will take it to Rome myself”, said Father Fusco, and all was done as we had said.

“About a month had passed when, one Sunday, my holy Bishop Petagna made it known that he wished to speak to me.

“As I climbed the stairs, I met some goodly old canons, in tears, who were saying,

“He would have done better to stay in his own diocese and not come and kill our bishop. If it hadn’t been for his cassock, I would have taken him for a policeman, so haughty and arrogant he was ...” Some other canons said to me,

“For charity’s sake, put an end to the cruel entreaties of the Bishop of Grenoble to Bishop Petagna. He is already so unwell.” I enquired as to the nature of the orders which the Bishop of Grenoble was giving to my holy Lord Bishop. I was told,

“The Bishop of Grenoble, with a bearing of powerful authority, is ordering our holy Lord Bishop to compel you to keep out of his diocese at all cost etc ..., etc ...” I went in and saw Bishop Fava for the first time. He was accompanied by a priest who, as I learned later, was Father Berthier, one of the missionaries of La Salette.

“The Bishop of Grenoble said to me, among other mundane banalities, that he had heard that I was here and had come a long way to see me. I thanked him. My holy Lord Bishop who was already quite unwell, felt exhausted and was in need of rest and above all of peace of mind. A servant came to tell him that his room was ready if he felt in need of rest. Then my holy Lord Bishop said to me,

“My Lord Bishop of Grenoble and Reverend Father Berthier will take their meals with you as, now I am so ill, there is no cooking done here and no-one eats at table anymore.” I told my holy Lord Bishop, while expressing my regret at his illness, that I thanked him for the honour he had granted me in having the Lord Bishop and the worthy priest in our home, and asked his leave to go and make the necessary preparations. My holy Lord Bishop, noticing the total lack of comment from Bishop Fava upon what had just been arranged, took it that he had not understood. He repeated the arrangements a second and then a third time, and I went back to prepare everything for the midday meal.

“With regard to this, I must state that everything, my rent, my maintenance and my meals were provided for by Bishop Petagna. (Combe Text).

“At noon, the Bishop of Grenoble arrived together with Father Berthier. His first words were:

“I went to Rome for three reasons: to gain approval for my Rule for the fathers and sisters; to obtain the title of basilica for the church on the mountain of La Salette, and to have a statue of Our Lady made, similar to the model I took with me. Because, you see, no statue can properly represent the Holy Virgin if she is wearing an apron and a shawl. Everybody complains

disapprovingly about this peasant-woman's dress. The model that I had made is much better! First of all, she will not be wearing a crucifix, because, you see, it grieves the pilgrims, and so the Holy Virgin ought not to be wearing a crucifix . . .' Enough, my pen refuses to reveal in detail everything his Lordship said. I was terrified, I could scarcely manage to utter,

"And, at the base of your statue, my Lord Bishop, you will write in large letters:

'Virgin of the vision of Bishop Fava!' We were called to table.

"After the meal, the Bishop of Grenoble opened up a balcony to see the countryside and especially Vesuvius which faced us. His Lordship asked me who we had as neighbours. I replied that we were alone.

"'Oh! What princely lodgings!'"

"He began to go round the rooms. He walked out on to the terrace which acted, when the weather was fine, as a play-ground for my pupils. For a long time he contemplated Vesuvius, the sea, the countryside; afterwards he came in, not without having opened up and inspected my work-room; and seeing so many letters on my desk, he said to me,

"'But your correspondence is a lot larger than my own! Where do all these letters come from?'"

"From all over Europe, my Lord."

"'You live in a palace too beautiful to be true. You don't even have to go out to go for a walk.'"

"After about three quarters of an hour or so, my Lord Bishop said he was going to bid Bishop Petagna farewell and take the train back to Rome.

"In the late afternoon, to my great astonishment a person sent by my holy Lord Bishop came to tell me that my holy Lord Bishop had something to tell me. I asked this person if my Lord Bishop of Grenoble had left.

"'Fortunately, he was just leaving'", she replied, "'when a messenger opened the door and handed Bishop Petagna a letter from Rome to be conveyed to you. So then, that "carbonaro" Bishop came back in and demanded to see the contents of the dispatch. He is causing our Lord Bishop much distress.'"

"I left with this person for the bishop's residence. When I arrived at the door I said to her,

"'No doubt my Lord Bishop of Grenoble will still be there. Go in and inform my Lord Bishop Petagna that I am waiting.' This was done.

"My holy Lord Bishop came to me with the dispatch and told me, in a low voice, something approaching this:

"'The Holy Father wishes to speak to you. Here is the part of the dispatch which concerns you: If Melanie is not unwell, and is able come to Rome, his Holiness would like to speak to her. If she cannot come, she is to send all that is relevant to the foundation of the new religious order of the Apostles of the Last Days.'

"I asked my Lord Bishop when he wished me to leave.

"'Today is Sunday', he said, 'and you still have preparations to make. There is no hurry.'"

"At that moment the Bishop of Grenoble rushed in and said,

"My Lord Bishop, I take it that you have told Melanie the whole of the dispatch. There is therefore no reason why you should not tell me."

"And my holy Lord Bishop replied humbly,

"I am sorry, my Lord, the dispatch contains matters regarding her and myself . . . What I can tell you is no secret. She has been summoned to Rome.'"

"Aha! and do you know why, and what she is going to do there, my Lord Bishop?"

"My holy Lord Bishop was silent.

"Very well. We will leave together this evening.'"

"Then I said,

"I do not travel on Sundays.'"

"But you must obey the Pope!'"

"The Holy Father did not tell me to leave immediately on receipt of the dispatch.'"

"Turning to my holy Lord Bishop, he said to him,

"You must order her to leave with me this evening, my Lord Bishop.'"

"My Lord Bishop, she cannot leave just like that. She has preparations to make and she must be given the time to make them, do you not agree?"

"You must obey! Obey! You know I am Bishop of Grenoble, and I've a lot to teach you, tell you and ask you! Let's see now. This evening, at ten o'clock, we must take the train to Rome. You will be there, will you not?"

"I do not know, my Lord Bishop.'"

"Oh'? but she must! My Lord Bishop!' he shrieked, "'Compel her, command her to leave with me, this evening!'"

"My holy Lord Bishop, deathly pale, replied,

"I do not know how to command those who obey the smallest gesture.'"

There is a variant in a letter to Mr. Schmid (53) who had asked for details . . .

"He was deeply pained by Bishop Fava's daring words.

"Command her, order Melanie to come into my diocese, it is absolutely imperative that she comes, etc . . .' My Lord Bishop gathered all his strength and replied briefly something approaching this:

"My Lord Bishop, the Good Lord sent me Sister Mary of the Cross, and I have given thanks for this each and every day. God has never made slaves of us. That is why here, in my diocese, she is at liberty; that is why I will not be responsible for commanding her, for ordering her to leave here.'"

"From that day, Bishop Petagna never left his bed again and public opinion was that the Bishop of Grenoble had caused his death . . .

(53) 3rd April, 1895.

"To put an end to the matter, I said I was going home. It was dark outside (54). The Bishop of Grenoble called out.

"'Goodbye. See you at ten o'clock!'" as he walked back into the living-room, and then I was able to speak and show my allegiance to my holy Lord Bishop who said to me,

"'My Lord Bishop of Grenoble will be the death of me. If you can, leave this evening to remove him from my sight. I will give you Father Fusco and your companion. Leave when you want to this evening, and may God bless you.'"

"When I arrived home, we consulted, thinking I wouldn't be staying in Rome for more than two or three days, as I had sent the Rule of the Mother of God there about a month before. Father Fusco said to me.

"'I believe you have been summoned to discuss the subject of the foundation of the Apostles of the Last Days, for at the Bishop's palace, the Bishop of Grenoble told us that when he went to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in order to speed up approval of his Rule, Cardinal Ferrier had given him to understand that at the moment he was busy and that His Lordship could take at least a week off to visit the monuments of Rome and the surrounding area . . . That is why the Bishop of Grenoble came here.'"

"We arranged to take the nine o'clock train from Castellamare. At ten, we were in Naples. We had to wait for the train for Rome. The Bishop of Grenoble ran up to us, quite out of breath:

"'I've been looking for you for half an hour! Well, then, come, we'll go and take our seats.' I thanked his Lordship and told him we always travelled third class.

"'But', he said, 'is there someone with you?'

"'A priest and my companion, my Lord Bishop.'

"'They can move to another coach. Give me your ticket, I'll have it changed to first class,'"

"I told him that as my holy Lord Bishop had had the kindness to give me these persons to accompany me, I could not leave them. His Lordship said, almost angrily,

"'I will have their tickets changed as well; but, do you know why you have been summoned to Rome?'"

"I replied,

"'No, and I'm not worried about it.' We left. The Bishop of Grenoble, who had so much to say to me, said nothing. It grieved me deeply to see that Father Fusco and my companion were being looked at askance and with what seemed to be anger. Father Berthier did not look happy. He had not managed to keep my companions out of our compartment by shutting the door, for straight away, the door had opened and Father Fusco had said as he entered,

(54) In a letter to Canon de Brandt, written 4th July 1879 soon after the event, she states that it was the 24th November; at four o'clock in the afternoon, it was dark.

“Excuse me, my Lord Bishop, for taking the liberty of coming in here, but it is the wish of our Lord Bishop of Castellamare that we stay by the side of Sister Mary of the Cross.”

“The Bishop of Grenoble did not answer.

“At seven o'clock on Monday morning we arrived in Rome, and there we parted. His Lordship and Father Berthier went off to the French seminary, I think, and we went to a church where Father Fusco celebrated Holy Mass. Afterwards, we found rooms in a hotel where we stayed more than a week, I believe.

(In the “Combe Text”, she says that it was close to the French seminary in “Santa-Chiara”. This small hotel still stands, opposite the seminary, not far from the Minerva.)

“On the first day, I let Cardinal Ferrieri know of our arrival, to place myself at his disposal. His Eminence sent word that he would give me notice in advance of the day when he would need my presence.

“And so we were at liberty every day after Holy Mass, and we spent pleasant afternoons in God's company, visiting the beautiful churches . . . , and the catacombs . . . But our first visits were paid to those people we knew to be most devoted believers in Our Lady of La Salette, for example. Cardinals Guidi and Consolini, who graciously offered me their services in any circumstances which might arrive. And I sent them both a copy of the “Secret” which I wished to publish with the imprimatur of my Lord Bishop Petagna (55).

“The Bishop of Grenoble most kindly sent Father Berthier every day to ask our news. And he found the landlord a great source of information as to how often we went out and for how long, where we were going, what we were doing, and if we had been paid any visits.

“One day, I think it was the third day, the landlord said to us,

“‘The priest who comes here every day and is with the Bishop of Grenoble, came to tell me on behalf of that Bishop that he was taking it upon himself to pay all your expenses here, and for as long as you stay in Rome.’ To close the matter now, I state that, when I was to join the Salesians and my companions were to return to Castellamare, I asked the landlord to remind the Bishop of Grenoble about our bill. The Bishop answered that he knew of no bill. The poor landlord couldn't get over it. And so I took the bill and paid it in full, while consoling the poor man (56).

“It must again be said here what I only had on good authority afterwards. My Lord Bishop of Grenoble did not waste time after our arrival in Rome. He

(55) See page 96.

(55) Bishop Petagna died too soon, while Melanie was still in Rome. The pamphlet was published in Lecce under the care and with the imprimatur of Bishop Zola.

(56) Bishop Petagna had given her some money for the journey, and perhaps on this occasion the few bearer-bonds which, together with those of Father Ronjon, constituted the mediocre resources of Melanie.

visited the Congregations, Cardinals and Bishops to find out with what aim and for what reasons the shepherd-girl of La Salette had been summoned to Rome. Someone told him that Cardinal Ferrieri had in his possession the Rule which the Holy Virgin had given to Melanie and that the cardinal's secretary, Monsignor Bianchi should be in a position to know these things. When the Bishop of Grenoble received this information, he went to find Monsignor Bianchi who told him there was to be a "Congress" on the matter. The Bishop of Grenoble saw in Monsignor Bianchi a man capable of helping him to combat "Melanie's Rule". He sought out—or bought— (I was told) other prelates.

II

"Towards the end of the week, Cardinal Ferrieri sent me word of the day and the hour I was expected.

"We arrived ten minutes early. During this time we stayed in the waiting room. The bell was rung almost continually, and each time the person at the door would say: His Eminence cannot be disturbed, there is an Extraordinary Congress taking place. And that was when I realised I was going to a Congress. There were two or three bishops who insisted on entering, one of them saying he had come at the invitation of the Bishop of Grenoble. None were let in.

"The hour passed. The Bishop of Grenoble had not come. Cardinal Ferrieri showed me in and sat me down at his side, while his secretary, Monsignor Bianchi sorted through some papers. The cardinal said to me,

"Is it a long time since you have been to the mountain of La Salette?"

"I went there in 1877"

"Do you know these priests, and their way of life?"

"I do not know them individually. They have never asked to speak to me, not even to learn more of the Holy Apparition. As for their way of life, private or public, rumour has it they are nothing but mediocre seculars, devoid of zeal, whose only occupation is the amassing of money, whose hearts are hard and filled with jealousy. It is a source of humiliation to me, Your Eminence, for I would be and would do much worse without the blessing of divine grace."

"Do you know of or have you ever been witness to an act which was not according to God's law?"

"I will tell you, Your Eminence, of something which pained me deeply. It occurred, I believe, in 1854. While the Bishop of Grenoble was seeking to get rid of me by means of exile, he sent me to spend a month or so on the mountain of La Salette. It was the month of February. Despite the snow and the bad roads, every day would see a few pilgrims arrive on mule-back. One day a rich lady arrived. All the Fathers went to meet her with ceremonious zeal, and when the mule-driver also wished to come in, because he carried the lady's luggage and moreover, because he was in need of a rest and some

refreshment, a father took the baggage and slammed the door in the face of the poor mule-driver, who was numb with the cold. He went to kneel down to hear Mass. Towards the end of the Holy Sacrifice, he fell heavily to the floor. I went to help him up and find him somewhere to sit. Yet not one of the Fathers nor any of those in their service, moved a muscle, nor after Mass did they offer him something to drink. I walked over and came upon Madame Denaz (the sister-in-law of one of the fathers) who told me,

“‘Go down to the kitchen. Your coffee’s waiting for you’, I ran down, took my cup and rushed to let the poor man in. Afterwards, he thanked me and said,

“‘You’ve put me back on my feet. It was dawn when I left Corps, and then walking in the snow for three hours, it takes it out of you. That lady had told me to ask the Fathers for a drink at her expense, they wouldn’t let me in. And you watch them ask to be paid for what they wouldn’t give me. They’re always doing things like that, these fathers, they’re not well liked.’ I took the cup back and Madame Denaz said to me,

“‘I’m sure you didn’t have your lunch and you gave it to the mule driver. If you stayed here for a while, the house would soon be destitute . . .’

“A few days later, there came a poor man among the pilgrims, who was asking alms of the strangers. As it happened, I was in the shop which the Fathers kept when the beggar came in asking to buy a simple medallion of Our Lady of La Salette before leaving the holy mountain. The person in charge of the shop put the medallion on the counter and the poor man took it in his hands and kissed it lovingly. The person in charge picked up the beggar’s coin but found it to be only a farthing (they were still around in those days). He rushed to call the poor man back, threw his farthing back at him and had the poor man hand over his medallion. Up there they didn’t know that to give to the poor is to pray to God. While still in the shop, I wanted to make sure that what the Fathers had told me was true, that they only sold objects of piety. I found jewellery, snuff-boxes and the like . . .”

“At this point my Lord Bishop of Grenoble arrived. He gave a salute-like greeting, with his hand at his forehead. There was a short discussion at the door. It seemed Father Berthier wanted to come in. The door was closed and we sat down. The “Congress” began.

“Cardinal Ferrieri said,

“‘Well, my Lord Bishop, I am told you have drawn up a Rule for your missionaries.’

“‘Yes, Your Eminence.’

“‘And were you aware that the Holy Virgin had given one to Melanie?’

“‘YES, Your Eminence, but my Rule is quite different to Melanie’s.’

“‘And what got into your head to make you draw up a Rule when you knew the Holy Virgin had given one to Melanie?’”

“No answer from Bishop Fava.

“‘But at least, you have consulted Melanie over the Rule?’”

“‘No, Your Eminence, never.’

“‘Well, then, we order Melanie to go to the mountain of La Salette with the Rule she received from the Holy Virgin and have it observed by the Fathers and the Sisters.’

“‘Your Eminence, I will only accept Melanie’s Rule when the Church has given me proof that it comes from the Holy Virgin.’”

“And then Monsignor Bianchi, the secretary, who according to Church Law and Regulations was there only to note down requests, objections and answers, (but who had been bought), said,

“‘Your Eminence, are you not aware that the nuns and Melanie are like that?’ and he held his two index fingers opposite each other, knocking them together. At this, I said,

“‘I have never spoken with the Sisters up there, so how can we be in disagreement? I really have no idea.’”

“His Eminence asked me what I thought of what my Lord Bishop of Grenoble had just said. I replied,

“‘I submit entirely, in all matters, to the decision of the Holy Church.’ I realised later that I should have said, “to the decision of the Holy Father”. This was a great blunder.

“His Lordship, wishing to know why the prelates whom he had hired as advocates had not arrived, went off. Left on my own, I expressed to Cardinal Ferrieri my astonishment at Bishop Fava’s solemn rebellion against the decision of the Holy Father. He said to me,

“‘Yes, I see, but French Bishops all think they are Popes! We are obliged to treat them with tact so as not to cause a schism. They are not Roman Papists. We endure them in order to avoid great disorder. Ah, if only you knew how much we have to put with from them.’”

“In order to explain what followed in the discussions at the “Congress”, I must tell you that, for a few months past, two or three good priests, wishing to devote themselves to the Institution of the Apostles of the Last Days, had been living as a community on the first floor of the same palace that we were living in. We had the second floor ... There seems little point in adding that all was done with the blessing of my Lord Bishop Petagna whose glorious memory lives on. And for two or three years I paid the rent for this floor with the subsidies I received for the Institution of the Mother of God ...

“These good fathers lived in retreat, in penance and sacred study. They only came up to us for meals. One of these fathers is still alive; he can be consulted if there is any doubt.

“I had said nothing nor given any cause for suspicion about this to the Bishop of Grenoble when he came to see me at Castellamare di Stabia. But I do not think the shrewd Father Berthier was wasting his time during my discussion with Bishop Fava. He would have questioned the people in the house and others who, with the best will in the world, would have put him in the picture.

"That is why Monsignor Bianchi, as soon as Cardinal Ferrieri had finished and was rising from his seat, said,

"Is it not fair to say, Your Eminence, that altar should not be raised up against altar? It is said Melanie has some priests with her, while there are the good missionaries on the mountain of La Salette. She is raising altar against altar."

"No, no," said His Eminence simply. And I said,

"I do not believe, Monsignor, I am raising altar against altar. The Fathers of La Salette are missionaries of La Salette, whilst those in Italy are the missionaries of the Mother of God, and they observe Her Rule."

"This is wrong, very wrong. It ought not to have been done," said Monsignor Bianchi.

"Then we took our leave. The "Congress" came to an end.

III

"As usual, Father Berthier came to our hotel to have our news. The next day, the bishop sent Father Berthier for me. His Lordship wished to have me visit the French Seminary. There, the Bishop of Grenoble was staying, and there, no woman ever entered. But his Lordship undertook to set aside the rules. No doubt Father Berthier took it that as he had come to fetch me, I would go alone with him. But my faithful travelling companions were ready to accompany me. We went in to the parlour where his Lordship was waiting. His displeasure at seeing me accompanied was quite evident.

"Oh, good," he said, "There you are! Just wait a moment, will you. I will go and request permission from the Superior for *you* to enter, and then we will visit the Seminary." And off he went; while he was away I was thinking: his Lordship will not be granted permission, and I'm beginning to think this is where the director (or teacher) who does not believe in La Salette is ... (57). I saw his Lordship returning. From his manner I could see he was not happy. He murmured a few words, and then came across to me and took me to one side. He asked me what I was going to say to the Pope.

"I do not know, my Lord Bishop, that will depend upon what the Holy Father says to me or asks me."

"But you must surely have an idea of what the Pope will say to you?"

"No, my Lord . . ."

"Ah! So you're not very well informed, so you are not aware that the Pope is not like other people. One must think, and prepare what one has to say to him."

(57) Father Daum, an advisor to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and regulars. He gave an unfavourable opinion on the Rule submitted by Melanie.

“Not knowing on what subject the Holy Father will design to speak to me, I cannot think. I abandon myself completely to the Holy Will of God.”

Variant in the “Combe” edition:

“If the Pope told you it would be useful to start a religious Congregation, would you feel you had the necessary talents?”

“I am ready, my Lord Bishop, to do anything the Holy Father tells me; and if his Holiness ordered me to do something beyond my capabilities and my powers, no doubt the Good Lord would give me new capabilities and powers. Moreover, it is not my habit to concern myself with what may be said to me and even less with what I may say in reply. It is enough for me to remain pliant under the breath of Eternal Wisdom.”

“Do you believe yourself to be important enough for God to concern Himself over you, and especially to tell you what you must say in reply?”

“My Lord Bishop, your Lordship will please correct me if I am in error. It is for me a fact of faith that the Most High will protect and help each one of His creatures as if he were alone on earth.”

“Good, good, my daughter, but listen . . . etc . . .”

“Listen to me carefully. I have a few hundred franc notes here to provide for your humble pleasures. If the Pope wishes to have you do something for him, each time you will reply to the Pope that you will do as the Bishop of Grenoble wishes. And if the Pope tells you to go to such and such a place or do such and such a thing, you will say: I will go wherever the Bishop of Grenoble tells me to go. I will follow in all matters the Bishop of Grenoble who is my true superior. And these few bank-notes are for your humble pleasures.”

“My Lord Bishop, I will only say to the Holy Father what my conscience tells me, at the very moment when I am given the distinguished honour of speaking to him. Your arguments are good, my Lord, but they are not my own.”

“And the Bishop of Grenoble who had offered me this money (yet he held the bank-notes firmly on the edge of his wallet), now began carefully to fold them away. And we parted, and no more did he send someone to have our news.

“From that day forth, I never saw the Bishop of Grenoble nor Father Berthier again.

IV

“It was, I believe, the 3rd December, 1878, that I was graciously granted an audience with Pope Leo XIII.

“The Holy Father greeted me with kindness and said to me, in very good French,

“Well! You will leave immediately for the mountain of La Salette with the Rule of the Most Holy Virgin, and You will have it observed by the priests and the nuns.”

"These words of the Holy Father confirmed my suspicion that he had not yet learnt of what took place at the Congress. (On this subject, before going to the Vatican, I had spoken to His Eminence, Cardinal Guidi.) I said,

"Who am I, most Holy Father, to dare to impose myself?"

"But yes, I tell you. You are going to leave with the Bishop of Grenoble and you will have the Rule of the Holy Virgin observed."

"Most Holy Father, permit me to tell you that, for a long time, these priests and sisters have led a more than secular life, and it will be very difficult for them to comply with a Rule of humility and self-sacrifice. It would seem easier to me to found an institution of secular people of good will, rather than all those on the mountain . . ."

"Listen, you are going up there with the Rule of the Holy Virgin which you make known to them. And those who do not wish to observe it, will be sent by the Bishop to some parish."

"Very well, Most Holy Father."

"And so you will leave, immediately I say; but as is the general rule, when the Good Lord deigns to give a rule for monastic life, He gives, He communicates to the same individual the spirit in which the rule must be observed; and that is why you must write this down when you are in Grenoble, before you go up to the mountain of La Salette, and you must send it to me."

"Oh! Most Holy Father, do not send me to Grenoble under Bishop Fava, for I will not have my freedom of action."

"How, how so?"

"Bishop Fava would order me to write down as he wished, not as the Holy Spirit would wish it."

"No, no. You will go alone into a room and write. When you have written several pages, you will send it to me."

"Most Holy Father, please forgive me if I make my difficulties too evident. When I have written two pages, my Lord Bishop of Grenoble will order me to hand them to him, and, under the pretext of improving them he will change everything, and order me to copy down his explanations on the way to practise the Rule of the Holy Virgin."

"Oh, surely not! This is what you will do. When you have filled a page, you will put it in an envelope yourself and seal it firmly, and you will put my address on it like this:

"His Holiness Pope Leo XIII, who is myself (sic)" he said, putting his hand on his chest.

"Most Holy Father, please forgive me if, again, I make too evident the revulsion I feel within me at the thought of writing under the authority of the Bishop of Grenoble. His Lordship will break the seal on my letter, change what I have written, and have his version copied out by another person, so that it will not be what I have written myself which will come into the hands of Your Holiness."

"Oh, surely not! The Bishop of Grenoble would not do such a thing!"

“‘Most Holy Father, I know his ways through experience. The old serpent never sleeps.’

“‘So what is to be done?’

“‘Send me, Most Holy Father, to any other country, anywhere so I am not under the Bishop of Grenoble.’”

“‘But how? I have ordered that you go to the mountain of La Salette in order to have the Rule which the Holy Virgin gave you, observed by the priests and nuns, and, before going up, you write down the Constitution and send it to me. And you know that when the Pope has given an order, he cannot go back on it.’”

“‘Most Holy Father, Our Lord has entrusted to you all power on earth to govern His Church. There is plenty of room on earth to come away and go back.’

Variant in the 1900 “Combe” edition:

“‘Most Holy Father, forgive me if I add; You are the Head of God’s Church, you have the keys to lock and to unlock. Our Lord Jesus Christ stated categorically to His disciples that He would not go to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. He did go, most Holy Father.’

“‘Listen to me. Pray well tonight, and tomorrow I will give you my decision.’

“The decision of the Holy Father was that she should stay in Rome while she drew up the constitutions which enabled the Rule to be applied. She was to reside with the Salesians on the Palatine Hill. She was taken there, on the order of the Pope by Cardinal Ferrieri and, of course, his secretary, Monsignor Bianchi.

“She was summoned by the cardinal and then, “we went back to the hotel”, she writes, “and there, alone with the good cardinal Ferrieri, I was informed by him, on behalf of the Holy Father, that it was his Holiness’ wish that I receive no visitors, for the curiosity of the people of Rome was great, and their continual visits to the parlour would prevent me writing anything. It was his Holiness’ wish that I be perfectly free, just as much to write and seal letters, as to receive them, with the seal intact, no matter who had sent them ...”

“In fact, she was given simply a small room similar to those which the nuns lived in, where the door did not have a lock, nor did any piece of furniture. And, if the Prioress of the convent did follow the instructions from the Vatican, letters and parcels from outside still arrived already opened.

“Mother Presentation, back at Castellamare to send up Melanie’s clothing and the notebooks in which she had begun to draw up the articles, warned her, with a note written in Modern Greek, that everything passed through the “little black room” of Monsignor Bianchi. Even Cardinal Guidi, who had offered to receive and send off the shepherdess’ mail, was tricked in this way. The note which he wrote to the Holy Father on the day of the Congress to put him on his guard against the traps set around the matter of the Rule, never reached its destination ...

Melanie, however, had begun the work which the Holy Father ordered her to carry out. This work, of great, continual difficulty, would be completed on the 5th January the next year. Monsignor Bianchi came regularly to enquire as to her news. He recommended that she be compelled to attend the services, taken on long walks on the Palatine Hill, among the ruins of the Caesars' Palace, and that the lamp in her room only be lit for one hour in the evening ... (59)

The most fantastic and the most unfavourable rumours about her were spread in both Rome and in the Diocese of Grenoble ... They claimed, Melanie had admitted to the Pope she hadn't seen anything on the mountain-side ... She would not obey the Holy Father, was excommunicated and put in prison in Rome ... or she was shut away in an enclosed convent which she was never to leave again, etc ... One of the missionaries from La Salette, Father Bernard, reproached her for her disobedience of the Pope.

She stood up valiantly to it all, but her health was deteriorating. One of the Salesian nuns, a Sister Placidia, who was somewhat outspoken, went as far as to tell the Mother Superior that the Holy Father had placed her in their keeping in good health, and that at the moment she looked as if she had risen from the grave. The Mother Superior remembered her responsibility and was alarmed. In short, she wrote to Cardinal Ferrieri and the order of the Holy Father was given to have her removed and sent back to Castellamare. She had the articles sent to Cardinal Ferrieri all of which she had written in Italian. But she only saw Monsignor Bianchi again.

"There had been much plotting and scheming. This was clear to me," she writes (60), "In the first place their Lordships did not keep to the order given

(59) Extract from the journal of the Community of Roman Salesians, copied, and translated from the Italian.

"1st December, 1878, our Mother Marie-Mechtilde Cagiati was visited by His Eminence Cardinal Ferrieri, who informed her of the express desire of His Holiness that we receive into our community Sister Mary of the Cross"—that is, the famous Melanie of La Salette—in Rome for reasons unknown. Two days later, His Eminence and Monsignor Bianchi brought her in. In placing her in the care of our Mother, they forbade her to let her speak to any outsiders whoever they might be. Her behaviour and her words had soon revealed to us what holiness lay enclosed in this chosen soul. She remained shut away in her room, busy writing. She would sit at the communal table and would sometimes attend our assemblies after Vespers. We can confirm that hers is a soul plunged deep into God, without the slightest affectation or peculiarity... Humble and grateful, she deemed herself unworthy of the small attentions shown her, saying warmly on these occasions that she was only a poor, simple shepherdess. We have been greatly enlightened by the charity she has shown towards our disabled sisters, devoting herself to their service both night and day. She stayed with us for about 5 months, waiting resignedly for the solution to her affairs. It was for health reasons that she was instructed to leave, 5th May, 1879...

Rome, Convent of the Visitation, Via Salaria 123

Sister Maria Christine Via, Mother Superior.

(60) Letter to Mr. Schmid, 19th November, 1894.

by the Holy Father when he said: 'I wish her to be free, and perfectly free.' Everything was done to make me become a Sister of the order of the Visitation. Letters written by the Mother Superior to the Holy Father to request my release did not reach him ... I was quite astonished when I heard from the Holy Father that I could return to Castellamare, and when Monsignor Bianchi came to the parlour to *repeat* that I should return to Castellamare. I requested an audience with the Pope. My request troubled him. When at first I had enquired about the health of the Holy Father, he told me he was very well; now he told me he was rather unwell. So then I said that as I had something to say to him, I would wait a few days. He told me there was no point as the Pope was ill, and would not be recovered so soon. If someone asked me what had made the Pope change his mind, I could not tell them. But my own conviction is that I must have been slandered in front of the Pope. Monsignor Bianchi and Bishop Fava must have conspired together ... On the Day of Judgement, we will learn of all these attempts to cloud the light ..."

RETURN TO CASTELLAMARE. PUBLICATION OF THE SECRET.

So, unable to obtain an audience, she returned, resigned, to Castellamare. Bishop Petagna had died, on the 15th December, 1879, exactly one month before. The small band of priests hoping to form the order of the Mother of God, had dispersed. Father Fusco had rejoined a community of his order ... All Melanie's support had gone. The new bishop of Castellamare, Bishop Sarnelli did not continue payment of the rent of the Ruffo Palace. Melanie went to live in a rural part of Castellamare, on the mountainside, at Scanzano.

Bishop Zola, however, had in no way changed his attitude towards her. Under his direction, with his "Imprimatur", the shepherdess' pamphlet, containing the full account of the Apparition, with the text of the Secret, was printed at Lecce and appeared on the 15th November 1879.

Bishop Zola, it seems, had no doubts about papal approval. He was aware that, had it not been for the illness and death of Bishop Petagna, the shepherdess' pamphlet would have been printed in Rome itself. On the 26th October, 1878, Melanie had written to Canon de Brandt,

"When informed of my intention to have printed a complete account of the events at La Salette ... one of the Cardinals decreed:

"Sister Mary of the Cross will send everything here to me, with the imprint of Bishop Petagna confirming that it is her own handwriting, and I shall add a few lines at the end, and take it upon myself to have it printed here in Rome ... and no-one will have any objections."

The Lecce edition, a small, unpretentious, slim booklet (61) did not in effect—any more than the Rule—arouse any opposition in the Sacred Congregations. There was even a rather Roman dilatoriness about the examination of the Rule of Bishop Fava which having received the conventional “decreto di lode” on the 27th May 1879, was only approved for a ten-year period in 1909, and then finally accepted on the 7th June 1929 (62).

In order to understand something of what must have occurred in the months following, it would be necessary to be in possession of the correspondence between Bishop Fava and Monsignor Bianchi. It would also be necessary to know the feelings of a certain number of French bishops who were greatly concerned over the victories of laicism and the menace of secularization, and who, troubled by the severity of the warnings in the Secret, felt that this was not the time to publicize reproaches of the clergy, which might act as a spring-board to anti-clerical activity.

It was no doubt these men who alerted the entourage of Leo XIII.

“Several French bishops, among others the Bishop of Nîmes (63) and another whose diocese I cannot recall, wrote to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, to the effect that, if these books (copies of the Lecce pamphlet) were not withdrawn from the hands of the faithful, and if the publication of such books was not prevented, all France would stop sending Peter’s pence.” (64)

This was more than enough to encourage the Vatican to be more obliging towards the French Bishops. It is known that at the time the keynote of policy towards the democratic governments was “Rally” (65), in particular towards the French government, which was for a long time so stubbornly Gallic, and whose Episcopate was only held to the Roman Church by a slender thread, as Melanie says (66).

From that time onwards, even though there was no intervention from a prefect of the Roman Congregations, there were still unofficial requests for Melanie to stop writing, and, for her supporters and friends to stop spreading her work. (Cardinal Caterini, Secretary of the Holy Office, requested Bishop Sarnelli of Castellamare to call upon Melanie to stop writing and adding

(61) The five hundred francs to finance the first edition in French were sent to Bishop Zola by Madame du Liège, the sister of Canon de Brandt.

(62) As for the statue in Bishop Fava’s vision, the “Madonna of the Contradiction” as Melanie calls it, it could not be produced, as the sculptor suffered a paralysis of the right arm; only the plaster model was crowned.

(63) One of those who publicised the Secret was Mr. Amédée Nicolas, of Nîmes (see bibliographical note in appendix).

(64) Letter to Mlle. Vernet, 20th July, 1894.

(65) Cardinal Lavigerie’s famous speech at Carthage took place in 1890, but it had been prepared and surrounded by a full publicity campaign.

(66) Note 66 appears to be missing from my copy of the text. Translator.

commentaries on what she had already written). Even Bishop Zola did not escape censure.

"This is confidential", Melanie later writes (to Mr. Schmid, 31st March, 1895), "in 1880 or 1881, I think, Cardinal Caterini wrote to Bishop Zola to the effect that he should no longer confess me or act as my spiritual guide. Bishop Zola travelled to Rome to see this cardinal, told him he had received his letter and thanked him, and then added that he was going to see the Pope to tender his resignation as Bishop of Lecce.

"But why?" asked Caterini.

"Since I am incapable of looking after the soul of a tiny woman like the shepherdess of La Salette, I am certainly much less capable of looking after an enormous diocese like that of Lecce."

"Oh, my Lord Bishop, I beg you, do not add this melancholy news to the already overwhelming burden of the Holy Father, promise me you will not cause him this great sorrow! I wrote that letter compelled by circumstances. Look at my desk; every day thousands of letters condemning Melanie arrive. They say that she has too much freedom, that she writes frightening things. They beseech us to put an end to the havoc her book has caused . . . , etc . . . ' (There were five letters from Caterini).

"When I arrived in Lecce", Melanie continues 'Bishop Zola said to me:

"do you wish to confess? Come to the chapel.' And he confessed me then, and all the time I stayed in Lecce."

Melanie later noted, from what she had learnt in Rome, that the Prefects of the Congregations, and the Holy Father knew nothing about this letter from Caterini which appeared to have been demanded by some lobby. It seems apologies were made to Bishop Zola, and she adds, along the lines of that amusing Italian formula that "poor Cardinal Caterini didn't get his portrait painted because of that letter . . ." (to de Brandt, 14th December, 1880).

The desired result, however, was achieved. In submission to the Church, Melanie was to refrain from writing or speaking out. When later pressed to write down the "Sight", she replied,

"It will be difficult for Canon B. (Brette) to obtain permission for me to write more "scary" as the cardinals in Rome say. As for myself, I wish to obey the Holy Church of God. 'Whosoever hears you, hears Me' said the Divine Lord. The Caterini letter seems to demonstrate the wishes of the Holy Father, and it tells the Bishop of Castellamare, my Lord Sarnelli, to forbid me to write things of this kind and to provide explanations of things already said . . . If Canon B. can be sure that this Caterini letter was written without the knowledge of the Holy Father, then I shall be free to write, and write I shall." (to Mr. Schmid, 25th. July 1896.)

For the time being, circumstances did not permit the first attempt to found an institution of the Apostles of the Last Days in Italy.

Several priests and nuns did, however, adopt the Rule of La Salette, and a charitable institution entitled "Il boccone del Povero" (lit.

A Mouthful for a poor man) was founded and developed in Palermo, in Sicily.

But it was in France that, thanks to the donation by Father Ronjon, there was a good chance of making a foundation. The appeals of Father Ronjon, and the needs of her elderly mother, now an invalid and back in Corps, decided Melanie to travel to France (67).

Firstly she respectfully requested the Pope's permission to leave Castellamare and to cross the border. This was granted. Her absence was not to be a long one (20th May to 20th June, 1882). Her lack of funds prevented her travelling for a longer period.

JOURNEY TO FRANCE. CHÂLON

Melanie set off, with her tiresome companion, Mother Presentation. Her two young sisters had married; one, Julie Oddos, in Marseilles (to a workman—a natural child, free thinker, who kept a common-law wife!); the other, Marie Guignir, at Lyons. Melanie stopped off in Marseilles for a few days, then went up to Corps to see her mother. On the 29th May, she spent a few hours on the holy mountain at the feet of the weeping Virgin. On the 7th June she was in Lyons (staying with Madame Guignir, 20, rue Mazenod) and from there she went on to see Father Ronjon at Châlon-sur-Saône (12th, 13th June). She was expecting to be joined there by Canon de Brandt. As the future Superior of the Apostles of the Last Days, he was in the best position to discuss with Father Ronjon the use his chapel would be put to. And Melanie, as she wished, as her “only achievement is to spoil everything” as she said, would be able to disappear . . . He sent his apologies. Nevertheless Melanie insists, and in a note from Lyons, dated 9th June,

“It seems to me you could still come if you left on Sunday afternoon to arrive in Châlon on Tuesday 13th. Father Ronjon would be so happy, we would both be.”

He did not come. As he got older the holy man lacked a little dash at critical moments.

“Who is this de Brandt?” Mr. Schmid asked Melanie one day. She replied,

“Who is he? A priest who paid me two visits at Castellamare and who appeared ready to die in the cause of justice. I told him to try to recruit some people with vocation, *true* vocation. All went passably well as he did not yet have any suffering to bear.” (68)

If Father Ronjon showed such great desire to have the arrival of Canon de Brandt coincide with Melanie's visit, it was because the death of his old friend Bishop de Margerie and the recent installation of Bishop Perraud in Autun made the matter of succession an urgent one.

(67) Her letters to Canon de Brandt are spread evenly across the duration of this journey.

(68) Letter to Mr. Schmid, 11th June 1894.

Bishop Perraud was only 54 years old. A former student of the "Ecole Normale Supérieure", a qualified teacher of History, an assistant lecturer at the Sorbonne under the Empire, an eloquent priest of the Oratory of France, a member of the French Academy in the same year as his installation as a Bishop, and soon elected a Superior of the Oratory, he was one of the most striking figures of the French clergy. His intellectual worth, His austere holiness, formed under the discipline of Père Gratry, his personality, the gravity of his manner, filled those around him with a mixture of awe and respect. He had the reputation of a saint. Upon arriving in the diocese and hearing of the age and situation of Father Ronjon, he proposed to purchase his property on behalf of the Oratorians, whom he would set up in Châlon.

Ronjon was already bound by the deed of transfer made out to Melanie. He went back on it. Bishop Perraud came to Châlon and met Father Ronjon, and advised him to have the Deed of Transfer torn up, "by a man of the law who would take everything off his hands". The Father refused and showed resistance to the wishes of his bishop. And so on the 15th April, 1882 (less than two months before Melanie's visit) Bishop Perraud had set down the declaration of five ecclesiastics of Châlon, which established that during the course of his ministry, Father Ronjon had collected around 30,000 francs in subscriptions and donations towards the restoration and maintenance of his chapel. The chapel came under the diocesan authority, and was not under the control of Father Ronjon.

A certain ambiguity escaped the good and simple Ronjon. While defending his legal rights as owner, he was pursuing the aim—arising from his priestly zeal—of having his precious chapel raised to the level of parish church. It would from that day onwards, under the legislation set down in the Concordat, have been taken over by the Ministry of Religion and be claimed by episcopal finances.

The old man sensed danger, but confusedly and ignorant of its source. It was to make sure, that he invited Melanie and de Brandt.

In the absence of the latter, Father Ronjon gave Melanie a copy of his Will, of the 11th January 1877, making her his inheritress, on condition that she maintained the service of the chapel and left it open to the public (69). He left her twelve Roman States Government income bonds, assignable to the chapel, and which were to return to the chapel after Melanie's death. Melanie undertook in addition—in a Deed bearing an Italian stamp, dated 26th February, 1883, at Castellamare—to hand the chapel and its income over to the diocese of Autun in the event of the breaking up of the proposed Order of the Mother of God.

In all this, Melanie saw herself merely as a temporary trustee. It is not to

(69) This particular clause alarmed Melanie beforehand. The seller, she says, should not make conditions... Her common sense warned her of a trap in store.

her, but to the Mother of God that these gifts are being made. And she was insistent that they be given quite freely by the donor.

"You know", she had written to Ronjon, 6th December, 1880, "that I look upon you as my father, and in all matters I wish to act in perfect accordance with your intentions . . . and . . . I want to keep my conscience clear since we are marching towards Eternity . . ." Later, (March 1887) at the hesitations of the poor priest pestered by his Bishop,

"You are perfectly free to do whatever seems right with what belongs to you, and to leave it to whoever, in your view, will give the most glory to God . . . Take back what you have given to the Immaculate Virgin; I am only the caretaker of Her property . . ." In fact, during her lifetime, Melanie was to receive an income of some 500 francs from the Ronjon bonds; 2,100 francs went to his income. However, "to keep her conscience clear," Melanie, in the event of her unexpected death and the establishment, despite this, of the order of the Apostles of the Last Days, made out a Will to the effect that the bonds deposited with her, together with the income they produced, would go to de Brandt and to Roubaud.

PART THREE

A CIRCUMSPECT CO-FOUNDER

RETURN TO CASTELLAMARE

On the 20th June, 1882, she arrived back in Castellamare, or rather in Scanzano (Scanzano is served by the post-office at Castellamare). She had suffered great disappointment but was quite calm. So few illusions did she have about the future chances of a foundation being made, that she wrote to Canon de Brandt (25th June),

“With all this persecution by the wretched French Government, it will be very hard for priests to gather and live a communal life. The Devil is reigning on Earth, and it is our fault. And so I feel that instead of founding institutions, it would be better to found in our hearts the true Christian and religious virtues.” And again, on the same subject (23rd November),

“Let us dismiss any idea of a foundation, and may each and every member called to the Order of the Mother of God act the apostle in his own way, and await the call to join ranks and ring out . . . How many of you are there? I don’t believe there are five of you to represent the five wounds of Jesus Christ and have a strong enough motive to predispose the Holy Father towards blessing the new institution,”

Dear Father Roubaud was almost continually unwell. A certain Father Rigaud, of Limoges, lost his way in politics. Another good priest, Father Le Baillif was too nervous a man; he showed much good will but was not reliable.

A small nucleus of sisters of the Mother of God gathered around Father Guyot, parish priest of Pierre, in the diocese of Nancy. They took in and cared for the elderly, and they observed the Rule. Canon de Brandt acquired the title-deeds of the small house, in order to clear up any doubt that the redoubtable shepherdess of La Salette might be involved. But yet again she was to be disappointed. After two years there was no trace of Father Guyot. He had taken dangerous steps and everything crumbled miserably. The affair was painful for Melanie. Her path was indeed that of the Cross, the naked Cross.

BACK TO FRANCE

Mother Presentation had fallen ill, and the doctors advised a change of climate. From Corps the saddening news arrived that Melanie’s mother was reduced to poverty, and concern for her eternal salvation tormented

Melanie. So she decided to go back to France, and this time, she was to be there for eight consecutive years (August 1884 to August 1892). As in 1882, she asked the permission of the Holy Father. Leo XIII granted her this and recommended "care and prudence". Cardinal Consolini sent her the reply with much kindness, adding a small "piece of paper" worth fifty francs (16th June, 1884).

On the 22nd August, having passed through Genes, Modane and Grenoble (avoiding Marseilles due to an outbreak of cholera there), the two ladies arrived in Corps at Melanie's mother's house. Mother Presentation was annoyed by the old woman's scathing remarks and "missing so the good Marseilles air" rejoined her family and finally left Melanie's side. Melanie spent the autumn and winter caring for her mother and doing the housework, completely cut off by the snow.

The feeling of Bishop Zola, however, was that the shepherdess should not remain in Corps, for she was too close to La Salette and visitors sought her out, offending the missionaries. Her mother wished to return to the South, and she looked for accommodation, first in Aix-en-Provence. The rents were high (400 to 500 francs a month) and were beyond her means, even though Canon de Brandt generously gave a hundred franc note every three or four months.

He suggested that the two women come and live with him, but the old lady (she was eighty) would not be up to such a journey, and, Melanie writes (1),

"I would never have dared even suggest it, and then she is not at ease with me, she looks on me, you might say, as a kind of foreigner ... All is thorns around me and I must keep complete silence ... Blessed be God by all things and in all things ..."

CANNES AND LE CANNET

Now her duty was silence on all that was more dear to her than her life, and a return to daily willing self sacrifice. Accommodation was finally found in Cannes, and there was placed "the necessary furniture for poor people like us" and everyday life began again (2).

Father Fusco came to visit them, and Father Roubaud, too, who lived in the area (he was parish priest of Vins, in Var). Other people who had tracked down the resting-place of the witness of La Salette presented themselves; among them was a countess from Bourg, who was none other than Princess Amelie of the Bourbons, bearing gifts of pots of jam, hoping to hear the prediction of the return of her family to the throne of France. And finally, more burdensome guests, Julie Calvat's favourite daughter and her husband

(1) Letter to de Brandt, 6th April, 1885.

(2) Letter to the same, 24th October, 1885.

Victor Oddos, who had found a job in a shop in Cannes. He was a terrible man, who only came back to his wife when his money ran out. He had once tried to strangle her.

"I said we shouldn't let him through the door again, my sister would agree, but what would happen? He would kill my mother, my sister and me, no doubt about it. That was our dilemma." (To de Brandt, 24th October, 1885).

The accommodation in Cannes was prepared for her by a private school teacher, with whom she was in correspondence, M. Antoine Carlevan. To help out in the first few months, he sent them his young cousin—a girl who is now an old lady and Prioress of a Camaldolian order of nuns in La Seyne (Var)—Mother Marie-Eymard. Her memories give us a few interesting details. One Friday she saw the appearance of the stigmata on Melanie's hands . . . she accompanied Melanie on her visit to the Dean of Cannes, Father Andre Barbe. She was urged to go to see Father Lambert, a curate who was kept under close surveillance lest he succumb to the despair he was experiencing after a crisis of scruples . . ." And there he was, all forlorn and sad, ". . . Father Andre spoke to him first . . . but only received negative reactions. Melanie spoke to him—the same reaction—she went on, and he made a show of not wanting to listen, then bent over to look at her and suddenly I saw his face change, his attention was caught. He smiled, waved goodbye most warmly and went back in. Father Andre seemed quite overjoyed and Melanie was overcome with tranquil joy . . . A little while after this visit, Father Lambert had changed so greatly that he was able to take on his ministry again and he was entrusted with a chaplaincy to nuns . . . Melanie", she further notes, "was an attractive woman despite the natural severity of her features . . . her attractiveness lay above all in the look she gave you . . . She received a few visitors. She said only what was necessary and sometimes would reply, according, no doubt, to the spirit in which the visitor spoke,"

"'It's all written down,' and nothing would make her say more. This I heard myself . . ."

She confined herself to asking the Canon for prayers "for the souls which are the plaything of the Prince of darkness." It was in this stormy, brutal atmosphere that she led her life of sacrifice and prayer.

It was not long, however, before they left the company of the Oddos family, and Melanie took a smaller apartment, the ground-floor of a small, remote house, named "Marie-Claire". There were no churches nearby, and yes, she would have been happier with Canon de Brandt:

"It would have been *too* good, may the Good Lord act as He wishes, and may His Holy Will be done in us" (3).

At this time she was urged to move to Pierre, into the Institution which was being founded under the Rule of the Mother of God. She felt that her "first, natural duty in all fairness," is to help her ageing mother to carry on, and to

(3) Letter to de Brandt, 31st January, 1886.

stay by her side. But as the cost of living kept rising, she moved to lower-rent accommodation, to Le Cannet de Cannes (to a house named "Fioupou", in the "Ardissons" quarter).

She was to spend three years there, in humble toil and cruel struggle, which she often covered up, but which can be glimpsed in her letters to de Brandt and a few letters to Ronjon.

Father Ronjon was going through a difficult time. He was afraid the Bishop of Autun would force him to close his chapel to the public, and he was at his wits' end. He wanted Melanie to appeal to the Holy Father, she showed prudence, and told him it would be better to await a more opportune time. They hurt her, these vacillations of Father Ronjon, as did the lack of energy and resolution of Canon de Brandt. She foresaw the Pierre disaster, where the Mother Superior insisted on taking on the duties of mistress of novices, without resigning her Superiorship, where three postulants went out freely for walks, where premature building was foolishly undertaken, and finally where the parish priest was by no means free from suspicion. Painfully, she sensed the approach of the harassment and persecution which was to plague convents, parishes and every Christian institution in France.

"The old serpent had got in everywhere: in kingdoms, in crowns, in the Chamber of Deputies, in families and in individuals themselves ..." (4)

As for herself, she was dying, of spiritual hunger, unable, as she was, to take communion except on rare occasions. The good parish priest of Le Cannet may well have built a fine church at Saint-Philomène, but to pay for it, he was to go away for collections which forced him to be absent for periods of two and three months. One curate served the other parish, some distance away, and only came to Saint-Philomène on Sundays. The witness of La Salette was suffering for herself and even more so for others:

"How many souls fall into Hell every day! And we sit and watch!"

To round off the picture, the idle elements of Cannes and Le Cannet "embroidered" her story in their own fashion: she was said to be seeking a "position"; when she went to the market, she bought only the finest and most expensive things; she wasn't to be trusted one little bit etc ..., etc ... On one particular 19th September, she was at prayer when her windows were stoned with bricks and unripened oranges; several panes were broken, and her mother took fright. At first, Melanie thought the uproar was the Devil's own work ...

"I soon saw that it was only his servants: a group of young people ... (5)

THE DEATH OF MADAME CALVAT

In the end the old lady clung to Melanie, for she could no longer do without

(4) Letter to de Brandt, 23rd December, 1885.

(5) See (4).

her. In the year 1888, she had agreed to do her Easter duty. Melanie, however, was worried about her last moments on earth. As soon as she saw the end approaching, she sent for the priest (6).

"He was hesitant in giving Extreme Unction. So I said to him,

'What's the point of this sacrament, if the invalid has lost all feeling? I want my mother to receive the sacraments in full awareness of their good effect.' Then he said to my mother,

'I am going to hear your confession! Everyone left the room, and I stayed at the door to make sure she was confessing; (she could not utter the words). The Father said to her,

'Do you confess all your sins?'

'Yes. Really.'

'Perform the act of contrition. I give you absolution.'

At this, I rushed to my mother's bedside (I acted wildly in my terrible fear of the eternal damnation of this soul!). Out loud, I went through her general confession, and after every sin, I said to her,

'Isn't it true, Mother, that you're really sorry about this, or that? And each time she replied,

'Yes. Really.' This Yes-Really meant: That is really it. Afterwards, I aroused in her grief at her sins and confidence in the infinite mercy of God. As you can imagine, those present were astonished at my effrontery. But a soul, I tell you, is paid for by the Blood of the divine Redeemer. I talk too much of myself, paltry creature that I am. I owe the eternal salvation of that poor soul to your prayers; and I did not merit it."

A SHORT SPELL IN MARSEILLES

As she lay dying, Melanie's mother had asked her to look after her elder brother, now an old bachelor somewhat hard of hearing. And so again she refused de Brandt's repeated offer to come and join him. Only, so that her brother could have something to do, and that she could be in a place where she could hear Mass every day of the week, she left Le Cannet and went back to live with the Oddos family in Marseilles. There, at 7, chemin de Saint Barnabe, she found family life once more. But not much later, her brother-in-law, Victor, made it obvious that he felt the house was over-crowded. Melanie left with her brother and moved into a small rented house, (in La Blancarde, 15 boulevard Atkinson), in an isolated area behind the railway station. Again she found herself some distance from a church. Her brother thought of going to stay with the Little Sisters of the Poor, but found he was not yet old enough. And so the waiting began; patience and then self-contempt.

(6) Letter of the 25th December, 1889 to Canon de Brandt. Her mother died on the 1st December.

THE RENNEPONT FOUNDATION

And then she was given great consolation and new hope. Four "Salettian" nuns had left their convent to embrace the Rule of Mary, and found the Institution of Our-Lady of La Salette (7).

"I think I talked to you," Melanie writes to Canon de Brandt, "about the local Mother Superior of the sisters of La Salette, Mother Saint-Jean. She yearned to be on the right path, to embrace the Rule of Mary. We had been in contact for about six years, and she came to see me in Corps. The Fathers, suspecting her of dealings with "that deluded Melanie", demoted her from the position of Mother Superior, and made her move to another convent. The Good Lord granted that her new Mother Superior held deep in her heart the desire to be a daughter of the Mother of God. And that is why the two Mothers Superior . . . requested of their Superior General and of their Bishop permission to embrace the Rule of Mary, or else to leave the order . . ." These nuns travelled to Marseilles on the 7th and 8th July, 1890. They were greeted warmly by the Bishop of Marseilles, who went on to remind them that they needed the authorisation of Bishop Fava to establish themselves in another diocese. He would not refuse them. In the diocese of Langres, at Maranville-Rennepont, Canon Roy was expecting them, as he needed nuns for a new institution. Father Charles Renault, of the same diocese, himself a candidate for the Order of the Apostles of the Last Days, would go to the Bishop to intervene, if necessary.

This time, would the seed fall on fertile ground and bear fruit? Melanie did not dare presume so. Mother Saint-Jean, was a true religious, humble and mortified, but the Mother Superior, Mother Saint-Joseph, was a bundle of nerves. She had not made her noviciate and had no intention of ever doing so. Good, pious people, who want to do good, in their own fashion, can surely hardly become the reflection of the Divine intention of the Immaculate Virgin, if they have no basic formation.

. . . And France was so sick, in her heart and in her mind!

Auguste Calvat, her elderly brother, found he was bored and so left Melanie and went back to Lerins. Left to herself, she would immediately have returned to Italy, but she was awaiting a reply from Bishop Zola. She moved house again, much nearer a church, (in Saint-Barnabé, 6, rue Neuve) on the outskirts of Marseilles, and there she shut herself away in solitude, in Lenten meditation, without a single wish or desire . . .

LEGAL PROCEEDINGS

It is at this time that Melanie feels the crushing weight of the great black cross she had seen in her childhood dream—a decisive proof of her mission.

(7) Letter of the 21st June, 1890.

On the 23rd April, 1891, a letter she had addressed to Father Ronjon five days before came back with the word "Deceased" written on the envelope (8). He had died on the 5th April.

Melanie did not waste time on conjectures nor on complaints. She went to the heart of the matter, to the actual substance of the wishes of the deceased: the chapel must continue to be served, and by a son of the Mother of God. She wrote briefly to Canon de Brandt in Amiens, and Father Renault in Rome, and to each she gave the power of attorney to act on her behalf (9).

On the 12th May, 1891, the two empowered gentlemen were in Châlon-sur-Saône, the next day in Autun, where they were greeted by Bishop Perraud. On the 17th May, de Brandt started back for Amiens, doubtless finding no point in continuing discussions he found fruitless. Melanie wrote to him,

"How tired you must have been after that journey! . . . And yet, who could better deal with such matters than Your Reverence?"

Father Renault stayed on, made a show of going to serve the chapel, which was in vain, as all the objects of worship had been removed, and Bishop Perraud forbade him to celebrate Mass in the diocese of Autun, despite his "celebret of Langres", and he returned to Rome, hoping to plead the case before the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.

The good Father Ronjon, in the belief that he was protected all around with guarantees, had complicated matters in a most singular fashion. In three codicils added successively to his Will, he had appointed two executors in the persons of two priests of the diocese of Autun, Father Dessus and Father Gautheron. Dessus declared himself unfit on medical grounds and disappeared from the scene. Gautheron, however, took it all upon himself, and, stating that Father Ronjon, in his last moments had shown regret at the transfer made out to Melanie, took an enthusiastic stand as defender of the diocesan rights (10).

And this was not all. On two occasions, Father Ronjon had asked Bishop Perraud to send a petition to Rome in which he requested that the capital whose income was endowed upon the chapel be deposited in the bank of Peter's Pence. As Bishop Perraud gave no reply, he had his petition taken to Rome by Father Charles Renault. Leo XIII declared that this institution of the Apostles of the Last Days was a very good work and accepted the deposit.

(8) A first letter, written towards the end of March, had not been answered. She sent a second to inform Ronjon of the number of a new deed on the Italian debt, as the first deed had been drawn and was now void. She was only the trustee, she was keeping the owner up to date.

(9) Father Charles Renault seemed set to succeed Father Ronjon. He had finished his studies in Rome with a doctorate in Canon Law and had joined the Order of the Apostles of the Last Days.

(10) Letter to Mlle. Vernet, dated 25th May, 1894.

But all this took some time. The reply from Monsignor Folghi, who administered the funds of the Holy See, to Father Ronjon, arrived in Châlôn on the 8th April 1891, three days after Ronjon's death.

If one can say that, in legal terms, strictly according to civil law, the case was quite clear cut, politically speaking, involving, as it did, the rights of the Holy See and episcopal rights, it lent itself easily to subtle arguments and confusing interpretations. And let us not forget that—as Melanie reminds Canon de Brandt—according to the spirit of the Rule, the Order of the Mother of God should be answerable directly to the Pope who was its true Superior after the Holy Virgin ...

Would Rome take an active interest in the matter?

For a while there was hesitation at the Bishop's palace in Autun and among lawyers in Châlôn. Bishop Perraud ordered the keys to the property of Ronjon to be handed over to his solicitor who wrote to Melanie (23rd April 1891) to notify her officially of the death of Father Ronjon and to enquire as to her plans on the subject of succession.

Behind the scenes, however, Bishop Perraud was seeing how the wind blew in the Vatican, and was taking steps with regard to the Sacred Congregation of the Council and the Papal Nuncio in Paris, Monsignor Ratelli; and the latter, in June, 1891, waived the donation of Ronjon's capital in the name of Pope Leo XIII. Thus things became clearer. The only obstacle was Melanie, and Melanie, after all, was nothing but a poor little girl, who could be got out of the way by means of compensation. A simple renunciation on her part, and everything would work out fine, no problems ...

But she saw things differently, and on a quite different level.

"I abandon any idea of abandoning the course I promised I would follow", she stated to Canon de Brandt. "I will not yield an ounce of what has been placed in my care, to the diocese of Autun ... I will not bend, never, before a sacred duty to justice ... I cannot, and will not in any way give up the wealth given to the Mother of God by Father Ronjon. I am waiting patiently and calmly to be questioned on this matter. I pray and will not stop praying that God enlightens those in need of enlightenment ..." (Letters of 17th May, 20th June, 13th August, 1891).

A devoted daughter of the Church, as she liked to call herself, and in her conception of this Church, deeply "Roman" in nature, she was incapable of entering into the complex arguments which compromised concordatarians had made a fact of life for French prelates. She had the realistic stubbornness typical of her peasant origins. The property of Ronjon had been donated to the Institution of the Mother of God, the stocks and shares which guaranteed the Institution, were the property of the Pope, who had agreed to this. As soon as Ronjon's executors had handed over to the Pope the deeds left by the deceased, for her part, Melanie would then hand over to the Pope the twelve deeds given her by Father Ronjon.

And if there was any question of a total renunciation, on her part, of the

Institution of the Mother of God, it was, in her view, for the Pope alone to make such a demand.

"If Pope Leo XIII commands, orders me to give everything over to him, despite the wishes of Father Ronjon, I shall deliver everything into his hands, on condition that such an order be signed by his own hand ..." (11).

Such is her unchanging, resolute attitude which she maintained when summoned on two separate occasions before Bishop Robert of Marseilles (28th March, 9th June 1892). A letter was read out to her, in Latin, addressed to Bishop Robert from the Sacred Congregation of the Council, a letter bearing no signature. It contained praise for Melanie, as if she were prepared to plant the Ronjon property at the feet of the Pope, before the Pope had even asked her.

"But", she says (12), "as my mind was quite made up, and my conscience was clear, I could not be blinded by compliments".

The matter was beginning to cause talk in ecclesiastical circles. One father of La Salette had written to Bishop Zola, urging him to steer Melanie into one of their communities. Thus, the Ronjon estate might well find its way back to them, and above all the Order of the Apostles of the Last Days, would not see the light of day apart from them, nor in opposition to them. Bishop Zola behaved with discretion and care. Nevertheless he was perturbed at the thought of the shepherdess being prey to so many plots and struggles, in which her unbending uprightness would make her very vulnerable. He wished she would therefore quickly do all that was necessary to put an end to the Châlon affair (easily done, he thought a month would see it all over), and then leave France and come back to him in Italy. This was what she wanted, too, but things could not happen so quickly.

The enthusiastic but fickle Father Renaut had left Rome "for another realm", having given up the struggle and deserted the Institution of the Mother of God. Without consulting Melanie, he had handed over the keys of the property to the Bishop of Autun in November, 1891, but had kept letters and important papers. What was to be done?

JOURNEY TO AMIENS

Melanie decided, in view of the offer by a cousin of Canon de Brandt (Count de Rougé), to pay her expenses, to go up to Amiens to see the superior of the Apostles of the Last Days (20th May to 1st June, 1892).

On the way, she visited the sisters of Rennepont. She was reasonably satisfied with "Madame Saint-Joseph", the Mother Superior, "a lady with her servants around her", she said, but she was pained by the absence of true

(11) Letter of 13th August, 1891, to de Brandt.

(12) Letter to de Brandt, dated 17th April, 1892.

religious spirit in the small community. In contrast, she was impressed and edified by the Picardy clergy. Canon de Brandt had her meet his kindly sister, Madame du Liège, and introduced her to several priests, among whom was Canon Hector Rigaux, parish priest of Argoeuves, near Druil-lez-Amiens.

She greeted the priest of Argoeuves by his name and said to him,

"Don't take the manuscript you have with you to the printers, it would cause Our Lord displeasure." She referred to an article in support of the Baron of Richemont, a believer in the legitimacy of the Naundorffs (13). Canon Rigaux had not said a single thing to her about it. He was dumbfounded (14).

Some time later, while paying homage to the piety and priestly zeal of Father Rigaux, Melanie wrote of him,

"He had his head in the clouds with that Naundorff business ..."

When she returned to Marseilles, she apologised to Canon de Brandt for not finding anything to say to Madame du Liège. "I felt very much," she wrote, "that I wasn't in my proper place ... I only found my tongue again on the way from Dijon to Marseilles, in the company of a famous actress from Rome. We had a long talk. I told her that where I lived, we also had the theatre, less dangerous than hers, and that I put the money I earn in a bank that gives you a thousand for just five, and I would be rejoicing in possessing it at the end of my journey ... She wanted to follow me ... When we arrived at Marseilles, she promised me never to miss Mass on Sunday." (15)

Melanie had not found the letter from Bishop Zola waiting for her as she had hoped. Lacking advice on what to do next she consulted a notary and a solicitor in Marseilles. On their advice, she wrote to the solicitor at Châlon-sur-Saône to bring in a bailiff to request the return of the keys and make out an inventory with the notary, in order to take all the necessary steps to arrive at a fair and practical solution.

"I would not like," she wrote (16), "to leave France and leave behind me muddles and irregularities at the moment of death, which, might be causes of distraction. It is so good to die in peace and joy."

As for the matter itself, she was resigned to the long delays involved and to await the decision at the end. As Bishop Zola had written to her saying he saw no reason why she should not come back with this expectation, and settle in the neighbourhood, she resolved to leave for Italy. She sold her small property in Saint-Barnabé, "without getting as much as fifty francs for it", and left Marseille on the 22nd August, 1892.

(13) The Baron of Richemont was one of the politicians who took Maximin to Ars.

(14) A note from the priest of Argoeuves himself, inscribed by Father Combe at the end of Melanie's letter to Canon de Brandt dated 26th June, 1892.

(15) Letter to de Brandt, 4th June, 1892.

(16) Letter to Canon de Brandt, 29th June, 1892.

GALATINA

She went straight to Lecce and then on to Galatina, a small, peaceful town where a friend of Bishop Zola, Canon Consenti, had found her accommodation.

San Pietro in Galatina was a small town of some 8,000 people, lying between Lecce and Otrante. It was still just, Melanie thought, as it must have been in the days of Our Lord with wells where the people argued over the scarce, brackish water, and cisterns crawling with small insects "as red as Free-Masons", and houses whose doors could only be shut from the outside. The only bread baked there was made of yellow semolina, and because of the heat, the whole town slept from mid-day to five o'clock.

But the little house rented for her by Canon Consenti at a modest rent, adjoined the church, and the whole Consenti family gave the shepherdess a very warm welcome.

From her letters, it appears she did not move in at Galatina until the 21st September. And so she probably first spent three weeks with Bishop Zola in Lecce. What cannot be doubted, is that from him she learned what was being said in Rome regarding the Ronjon estate. Bishop Perraud succeeded in convincing the Roman Congregations that as Father Ronjon had collected a considerable amount in donations in the diocese of Autun for the restoration of his chapel and his house, his claim to ownership of this property and even the income they produced was illegal: his Will was in error, the Deed of Transfer to Melanie was completely invalid, as was the donation of the capital to the Holy See, which, in such circumstances, could not accept it.

Galatina lies not in the diocese of Lecce, but in the Archbishopric of Otrante. It was the Archbishop of Otrante who had Melanie send to Rome a copy of the Deed of Transfer and a letter to the Holy Father (2nd November, 1892). In the letter Melanie protested that, if His Holiness truly believed that the property of Father Ronjon had been illegally acquired, she was quite ready to yield every last brick of it, and to forego her rights, in an act of obedience to the vicar of Jesus Christ (17).

This was an invitation to Rome to enter into the affair, passing over the head of Bishop Perraud. But Bishop Perraud, about to be made cardinal at the request of the French Government, carried too much weight in the Vatican, and had to be dealt with tactfully. Indirectly, Melanie was given to understand that it was not because of the Pope, but because of the Bishop of Autun that her surrender was awaited. As she said, the battle recommenced.

When informed of these events, Canon de Brandt was deeply puzzled. He proposed selling the Châlon property to a trustworthy layman (in this case his cousin, the Count de Rougé).

Still nothing definite was decided in an interview Melanie was called to with the Archbishop of Otrante, on the 3rd January, 1893.

(17). Letter to Mlle. Vernet, 25th May, 1894.

The journey she made, however, filled her with joy, for she was able, in Otrante, to honour the relics of the martyrs sacrificed by the Turks in the fifteenth century, and the marvellous golden statue of the Madonna, carried off by privateers and later reappearing in Italy quite alone ...

And thus the winter passed. She wondered if the case would go to Rome, and if there could be found, after the deplorable desertion of Father Renault, an unattached priest, who was devoted to the Institution of the Mother of God, and whom the Bishop of Autun could be persuaded to appoint to serve the chapel. Would Canon de Brandt act with the shepherdess' proxy? Would he not take possession of the Ronjon estate?

Since Melanie's letter to the Holy Father, Rome was "lying low". The Archbishop of Otrante had gone there and a rumour was spread that on his return, if Melanie did not abandon her claim to the Châlon property, he would be obliged to excommunicate her. There was no truth in it whatsoever. And Melanie remained "as firm as a rock".

"I do not owe it to my merits, nor to my spiritual knowledge that I remain 'as firm as a rock', she writes (18). "The more I see myself swimming in bitterness, the happier I am to have found the Beloved of our souls; the One who enters within us only when all that is artificial and human has gone out".

RETURN TO CHÂLON

After two years of beating about the bush, possession had still not been taken. The wishes of Father Ronjon had not been carried out. The people of the Citadelle suffered because of it. Melanie's conscience reproached her for indifference and lack of action. As she had received no further injunction from Rome, she resolved to go back to Châlon.

She arrived, alone, on the 16th May, 1893. She went over to the Hotel de Bourgogne, on the Place de l'Obélisque, to see the solicitor who held the keys in deposit, went on with him to see the notary, then on to another solicitor who undertook to claim back the keys from the executor (Father Gautheron) who was holding them improperly (19). The legal procedure got underway, and Melanie Calvat was given possession of the property by provisional order. In order to show proof at one and the same time of zeal, deference and conciliation towards the Bishop, Melanie wrote to him requesting him to approve, or to select, a priest to serve the chapel. She wrote several times and none of her letters received a reply.

But the reply came in the form of an order of the Bishop of Autun to close the chapel. And on the same day that this order was posted, and read from the pulpit in the two parishes of Châlon, Melanie received notification of the loss

(18) Letter of the 6th March, 1893, to de Brandt.

(19) Letter to Mlle. Vernet, 25th May, 1894.

of the privilege of the sacraments in the diocese of Autun (3rd June, 1893). She tried to hold on, and went to see Father Gautheron. But realising she was powerless and defeated, she shut up the estate and with no further delay, left for Galatina (17th July, 1893).

The day before she left, she received a writ from the magistrates' court of Châlon-sur-Saône, signed by Gautheron and Dessus giving notice of the annulment of the Deed of Transfer of the 24th August, 1878. It was taken to court and the magistrates decided in favour of Gautheron and Dessus: the case was lost. Melanie followed the developments from Galatina by correspondence. She agreed for an appeal to be made on her behalf at the Court of Justice in Dijon.

THE APPEAL AT DIJON

A second case was now approaching. Back in her retreat "in the depths of Italy", Melanie was unaware that a handful of newspapers had kept the public fully informed of the Châlon case. These, as one might have expected, were organs of the opposition to the secular Republic. Among their number was a periodical fighting for the royalist cause and the succession of the Naundorffs. This was "La Legitimite", a monthly review. The secretary of this publication, Mlle Vernet, was the daughter of a post-office employee, who had been a postmistress at La Mûre (Isère). Mlle Vernet had been brought up in devotion to La Salette. She took up Melanie's cause and wrote to her, to put herself and her colleague on "La Legitimite", M. Schmid, at her disposal, to make preparations for the appeal and assure her favourable publicity. In complete isolation, Melanie was touched by this interest, freely shown in all sincerity. Of delicate health, already showing signs that death was near, Mlle Vernet was endowed with an angelic piety, which lent apostolic colour to her patriotic ideals. M. Schmid seemed to be the typical Catholic publicist of the era, displaying aggression in his articles and reticence in his deeds, an enthusiastic member of short-lived societies, as full of good intentions as he was short of talent, all the same a really good man. He caused Melanie—who called him her Venerated Brother, as he wished to join the Apostles of the Last Days—quite some joy, and quite a few disappointments.

At this time a correspondence was begun (from 21st April 1894, to 2nd September, 1897), firstly between Melanie and Mlle Vernet and then with M. Schmid. In order to fill out her defence, the latter asked her hundreds of questions about her private life, made her go back over the details of the Apparition, and drew forth confidences which otherwise she would never have given.

Through him, this distant woman, so much a stranger to the world, was called upon as a witness in all the skirmishes and even scandals of the Paris newspapers at the end of the nineteenth century. She took out a subscription

to "La Libre Parole" (The Free Word), which was to publish the "Secret of La Salette" in 1895, she received the publications of Leo Taxil; she was asked for her opinion of Rochefort, Gaston Méry, etc . . . she was consulted on ways to fight free-masonry, and without any preliminary initiation, the shepherdess of the holy mountain was plunged into the world of religious and political leagues whose atmosphere was most evident in the letters she received. In her letters she showed herself to be a lively correspondent, full of surprises.

Through her, the Dijon case can be followed. Melanie did not move from Galatina. M. Schmid acquired for her the services of a Parisian lawyer, an associate on "La Legitimite", Robinet de Cléry. The Dijon lawyer acquired himself most conscientiously of his duties. The case ran from the 15th May to 19th June, 1894. Despite the lack of coherence in the arguments, on one side establishing the fact that Melanie was not in legitimate possession of the estate, on the other, putting her at fault in order to make her give up "what she did not own"; despite the fact that if she had not fulfilled her duty of having the chapel served, it was because she had been prevented from so doing by the closure ordered by the Bishop, the appeal was rejected, and the conclusions of the Court of Justice of Dijon gave full backing to the decision of the magistrates of Châlon (20).

AFTER THE CASE WAS LOST

Melanie wrote to Canon de Brandt (21),

"I have done all I could, my conscience is clear . . . I lost, I expected as much. I am happy about this, except for the insult to God."

She wondered if she were to be deprived of the small income that came from Father Ronjon. Of the twelve bonds he had given her, there were eleven left, one having been sold by Schmid to pay legal costs. She did not agree to this immediately, but it wasn't for her, but for Father Ronjon, that was justifiable. She was ordered to pay costs: would she be arrested? The costs came to 2,000 francs, and before the quarterly gift of 100 francs from Canon de Brandt, she had, she said, three francs left to spend (22). She added,

"I have not yet received notification of the verdict. I await it with peace of

(20) Perhaps the French Courts were not kindly disposed towards legacies and gifts to the Holy See. Melanie writes to Schmid, 30th July 1895.

"At the same time as I was losing my case, the Pope was losing his on the third reading." It concerned a gift of 5 million francs left to the Holy Father in the will of the Marchioness de Belliare du Plessis (probably Bellière du Plessis or du Plessis-Bellière?).

(21) Letters dated 19th May and 2nd July, 1895.

(22) Her income remained intact, her liberty unthreatened, and she did not pay costs. When, close to death, at Diou, she altered her Will, she possessed 19,000 francs, 8,000 of which came from Ronjon, and the rest from Bishop Petagna.

mind, and afterwards, I shall say with the holy Job: Naked came I to earth, and naked I shall leave it. May God be blessed for everything.”

In 1898, Mr. Schmid was to publish in one volume, an account of the trial, together with a preface and a few comments (23). The victors were in the wrong. Even Melanie’s defense counsel, the advocate Robinet de Cléry, advised his client and her friends to keep a prudent silence. Even in Italy, among those prelates who were most inclined to believe in the shepherdess’ divine mission, the impression was a worrisky one. Melanie was urged by Rome to be silent in the future.

Finally, even Bishop Zola, whilst still as always maintaining his most favourable attitude towards “the divine revelations of La Salette”, the authenticity of the Secret, Melanie’s virtues and spiritual qualities (24), whilst stating that she “leads a completely solitary and edifying life”, added,

“For the last two years, Melanie has been in dispute with a Bishop of France. In this situation, she has shown little submission to her Superiors, out of ignorance or lack of direction, or perhaps both. During this time, she has never enjoyed any consideration from Rome.”

In a letter from Galatina to M. Schmid, (26th July, 1896), Melanie herself, with a humble loyalty to the truth, upheld the words of Bishop Zola, which religious reviews, given copy of the text, thought best to replace with dotted-lines. Dotted lines were in great use at that time, when the subject was the terrible La Salette.

TO GALLIPOLI FOR A SEASIDE CURE

While the trial was in progress at Dijon, Melanie was suffering from chronic rheumatism in the joints. She never mentioned the pain except when her left arm was paralysed, sometimes both arms, when she couldn’t put things down properly, and when she found it impossible to write. The Italian doctor whom she consulted, recommended the waters of Gallipoli.

“Here I am in this sea-port,” she wrote to M. Schmid, 20th August, 1895, “until the end of the month I think ... I know quite well that bathing in the sea does not cure rheumatism. It has been ordered me, and I obey.” And on her return to Galatina (25),

“Bathing in the sea did me neither any good nor any harm ... Only the Gallipoli air aroused my appetite to such a degree that at midday I would eat

(23) See Bibliographical note in Appendix.

(24) Letter from Bishop Zola of Lecce to Reverend Father Jena Kunzlé, the Director General of the Priests of Adoration of Switzerland, Germany and Austria-Hungary in Feldkirch in Austria, dated 5th March, 1896.

(25) Letter to Mlle. Vernet, 14th September, 1894.

a whole 5 centimes loaf; but now I am back here, I carry on as usual ... (26) The weather was very fine for the whole month and I was able to contemplate the attributes of God at my leisure." This undoubtedly was the most important part of this seaside cure.

TO FRANCE AND PARIS

In spite of all the disappointments and trials, the desire to go back to La Salette and her homeland burned in the heart of the exiled shepherdess.

She followed events in France with an avid interest. M. Schmid aroused her interest in the anti-Freemasonry movement, the League of the Labarum, the Knights of St. George and so forth, and, true Parisian chronicler that he was, left her ignorant of none of the stories which journalism feeds upon. The general opinion was that things were leading up to a war or a revolution, or perhaps both, and certainly, (before the anticipated change of government) there would be religious persecution. If Melanie did not go very soon, the trip would become impossible for some time ...

Canon de Brandt wishing to meet her again, spoke of meeting her at La Salette, and his cousin, Count de Rouge, sent Melanie 300 francs for the journey (27).

And so off she went, first stop Lecce, to see Bishop Zola. Then she set off on the long trip through Bologna, Pleasance, Alexandria and Turin. After several days of journeying, she stopped off for a few hours to see her sister, Julie Oddos, (2, rue Croix de Reynier), and then, on the 19th May, 1896, she reached the holy mountain and was joined by Count de Rougé. De Brandt did not arrive. She only spent a day at La Salette, then returned to Marseilles, and, on an invitation from M. Schmid, she left for Paris on the 21st May. There she passed eleven days, fully occupied visiting all the churches shown her by her guide, M. Schmid. With him, and the company of the knights of St. George, she went on a pilgrimage to Longpoint. And it was there that she appeared, unknown to herself, in a group photograph. She is standing well in the background, her face remains blurred, but her outline, leaning slightly forward on her umbrella, gives an impression of modest tranquility (28).

The excellent Schmid lavished her with care and attention, and made her take a pair of spectacles along. She later protested at "his overwhelming goodness". On 2nd June, she was back in Marseilles, where she missed the churches of Paris in which she had seen real prayer. She would have left on the spot were it not for the entreaties of her sister. She finally returned to Galatina on the 19th June.

(26) Which consisted of a bite to eat about once a week. In Diou, the doctor called by Combe stated "that this lady has no stomach left". It had shrunk away due to her fasting.

(27) Letter to de Brandt, 6th April, 1894.

(28) This rather faded photograph appears on the first page in M. Schmid's book.

MESSINA

Around this time Melanie made the acquaintance of Canon Annibale di Francia, and became involved in a short but astonishing adventure, which we know of from her Italian autobiography, and which caused a church of white marble to be built over her gravestone (29).

Canon Annibale di Francia was descended from the princes of Anjou who once reigned over Sicily. Some forty years old, with an open, expressive face typical of the French, he was universally loved in Messina. He had founded the Institute of the Daughters of the Divine Zeal of the Heart of Jesus to help the poor and care for orphans (30). But his Institution was a cause of grave concern to him. Lacking a sound, practical base, it seemed in danger of breaking up. If Canon Annibale burned with passionate charity, he perhaps lacked a certain level headedness. His mother had suffered some kind of mental illness. Melanie, in her own inimitable style, said he had a "fixation", and got so carried away with his exclusive love for the poor, that he became boldly imprudent.

He was a man of lyrical temperament, a poet. Yet humble and saintly, he lived a life of poverty, on the collections taken by his nuns. He felt incapable, on his own, of setting up a lasting Institution.

He tried to meet the shepherdess of La Salette. He went to Castellamare di Stabia. "It was in vain", he said (31); "this fugitive dove had moved her nest elsewhere ..."

Before long, he received Melanie's address in Galatina through Bishop Zola, and opened a correspondence with her.

(29) "QUI NEL SACRO TEMPIO DI DIO trovarono quiete et riposo le stanche et travagliate ossa d'ell'umile pastorella della Salette Melania Calvat, nata in Corps paesello della Francia il di 7 novembre 1831, decessa in odore di santita il di 14 dicembre 1904 in Altamura. Amorosamente qui custodite dalle FIGLIE DEL DIVINO ZELO del Cuore di Gesu cui appartenne quale sapiente CONFUNDATRICE. O Anima Eletta t'invocheranno e ti pregheranno sempre eterna pace let tue care figliuole e sorelle in Gesu e Maria."

Here, in the holy Church of God, repose in final tranquility the last remains of the humble shepherdess of La Salette, Melanie Calvat. Born in Corps, in the country of France, 7th November, 1831, died in odour of sanctity at Altamura, 14th December, 1904. With deep filial devotion, here the Daughters of the Divine Zeal of the Heart of Jesus watch over their wise co-founder. Oh chosen soul, in your eternal peace will your dear daughters and sisters in Jesus and Mary, always invoke you and pray for you.

(30) Popularly called "Suore Antoniane" in Italy, because their patron saint is St. Anthony of Padua, these sisters had, in 1938, twenty-seven institutions in southern Italy.

(31) Funeral oration quoted from above. Melanie wished to leave Galatina where rumours spreading from Rome about the Ronjon-Perraud case were causing her disturbance. She thought of moving to Benevento. The priest whom she had asked to find her accommodation there did not keep the secret she had requested him to keep, and so she gave up this plan and agreed to move to Sicily. (Letter to de Brandt, 26 October, 1897.) Such is her desire to vanish into thin air, that she then stopped writing to Schmid, who had no idea where she was going. She felt friendship for him, but was wary of his journalistic indiscretion.

"One day, she wrote to me that she was going to leave Galatina and would inform no one of her new address ... (32). I decided to go and find her ... I came upon Melanie in her poor dwelling, I talked with her, and listened to her recount the great Apparition of La Salette; profound and holy were my feelings. I invited her to Messina, but she did not make any decision ... On my return, I found my poor Institute about to breathe its last. So then I made bold to explain the situation to the Lord's chosen one, and repeated my invitation, beseeching her to come at least for a year. The reply was immediate: she would come with the aim of organising and moulding this Community of the Daughters of the Divine Zeal of the Heart of Jesus ..."

And thus Melanie left Galatina for Messina. She was greeted by the most grateful canon at the monastery delle Spirito Santo, on the morning of the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, 14th September, 1897. She stayed until 2nd October, 1898.

What a woman to have as Co-Founder and Mistress of Novices of the young community! Canon Annibale recalls this in words vibrant with gratitude. She herself in her letters, makes herself out never to be up to the task, always inadequate, because of the defects in her character, always falling short of the difficult work she had taken on.

She was, however, completely and utterly devoted to it. She was always on her feet, checking the orphans' dormitories at night, and generally looking after anything and everything. She drew up a set of rules for the sisters, and another one for the orphans, had them applied, and by her example of spiritual energy, her spirit of mortification, as by her good humour and her child-like simplicity, new life was put in these rather listless creatures, and young girls and nuns were drawn to the revitalised Institute. She felt at home among these impulsive Sicilian women and girls, simple in their faith. At first, in a desire to remain hidden, she called herself Madame Barnaud, her mother's name. But soon her innate honesty and the power of her love of God overwhelmed this guarded caution (33). That year in Messina, and just that one single year, was the only time she showed her true self, and displayed the vital signs of her mystical life of consummate union with Jesus Christ.

Canon Annibale was able to collect together some of her intimate disclosures; even better, he ordered—as Superior of the Establishment, and also as Melanie's Superior, whom she must obey—that she must write out for him in Italian, a spiritual account of her childhood.

(32) Funeral oration of Sister Mary of the Cross, given at the anniversary service (14th December 1905) at Altamura by Canon A. M. Di Francia, Messina, 1905 (Tip. ant. del Sacro Cuoro.)

(33) "She was a tiny child emerging from the christening font, yet rich in wisdom and prudence. Every sense, every fibre, every faculty of this creature of God was quivering with love... (Funeral Oration).

She had neither the time to finish nor to re-read it, which gives this rough draft, as bright as a flash of lightning, rapid and simple, its incomparable value.

A mystic himself, Canon Annibale was quite enraptured. The Holy Spirit was present in this exceptional creature whose only nourishment was the Eucharist. He sought to link her closely to his Institution. He had given his nuns a special prayer and motto, the words of Our Lord to his Apostles:

"Rogate ergo Dominum Messis ut mittat operarios in messem suam ..."

This was a supplication made to please Melanie, a sacrifice to God in order to obtain true Apostles of the Gospel. Despite Melanie's humble reticence, there is no doubt as to the effectiveness of her activities at Messina. Everything lay upon her shoulders, even tussles with the civil authorities. It was she who met the inspectors when a typhus epidemic broke out. She merely showed them the infirmary, and they did not insist any further. But the physical conditions in which the Institute had been set up were a source of insurmountable problems.

The monastery was installed in the buildings of an old convent of Benedictine nuns who were driven out by the Revolution. It was occupied by soldiers and left by them in a state of semi-ruin. Seventy-seven orphans had been gathered there and the Institution had no income, no capital, nor any book to be kept. A steam-driven kneading-trough, which produced the best bread in Messina (people queued to buy it) kept it alive, but still they needed enough credit to buy flour and pay the driver. By the end of her year there, Melanie had spent most of the money Father Combe had sent her for the journey, on sacks of flour for the Institute.

It was not the threat of failure, however, which decided her not to prolong her stay of a year. Melanie never avoided suffering, poverty, or humiliations. She avoided the curiosity, the admiration, the praise of others. Since the Ronjon case especially, she had looked to find a hiding place, to protect from outrage the Divine Message which she still carried, more tenderly and religiously than ever, but hidden from the world which had not wanted to know. And Canon Annibale was not a discreet man.

For him, "Crocefissa", The Crucified One, as he called Melanie, was a saint. With a very Italian kind of enthusiasm, he had already laid claim to her relics. He carried her shepherd's whistle everywhere, without a thought of giving it back to her. He jealously guarded her Italian autobiography, which she regretted having filled, despite herself, with her most intimate confidences.

It was definitely time for her to leave Messina. She had fulfilled the duty she had taken on, and the Institute of the Divine Zeal, if it was to survive, would have to survive without her.

And so it was goodbye to Sicily, and perhaps, if need be, goodbye to dear Italy. Flee she must.

Her departure was in fact something of a flight. Without saying goodbye, or saying where she was going, she departed.

Her goal this time was France, and, in France, the parish of Diou in Allier, where the parish priest was Father Gilbert Emile Combe. Father Combe was born in Cusset, near Vichy, in 1845. He died in retirement in Moulins in 1927 at the age of 82. Melanie had told him,

"You will live to be an old man!" Even more of a mathematician than a theologian, he had an exacting, even meticulous mind. He was the author of two much respected treatises on "Modern Pantheism" and on "Natural and Supernatural Virtues, infused and acquired". He was slightly pessimistic in character (he suffered from chronic enteritis and very bad nerves), he was grieved by the advance of irreligion, and devoted himself to a close watch on the future, in anticipation of the events which Providence would send us, to reawaken faith and change the course of history.

With such a temperament and inclination of mind, Combe must have been avidly interested in the apocalyptic side of the "Secret".

Moreover, in France as in Italy, fashion had now turned towards prophecies. The place was swarming with witnesses, seers and snake-charmers. This was the era of Mlle. Couesdon and her angel Gabriel, the Loigny affair, and many other mystico-political affairs, however much condemned by the Church. In Italy, no longer daring to comment openly upon the "Secret", Canon Consenti, Melanie's confessor at Galatina, and Father Giacchetti published "Great News", and "The Future of Mankind".

Father Combe composed a short tract entitled "The Great Coup" (34). It contained a reproduction of the text of the "Secret".

It was thus that he made the acquaintance of Father Roubaud, one of the first adherents to the Rule of the Mother of God, and through him, of Melanie, too.

"When", he wrote (35), "I began my tract 'The Great Coup and its Probable Date', I only knew the shepherdess of La Salette by name, and did not know if she were still alive. I knew absolutely nothing of what had become of her after the Apparition of 19th September, 1846, and was curious to find out. I had been sent a printed version of her famous "Secret", which interested and enlightened me. I thought of writing five or six pages on the probable date of the great punishments involved, and offering them to Father Bailly for the Almanach of "The Pilgrim" for 1894. His answer was that it was too late—the Almanach was in the press. And so I decided to write a short pamphlet. At the same time I learned that the shepherdess of La Salette was still alive. The dean of Saint-Pourcain-sur-Sioule (Father Moitron), a friend

(34) See bibliographical note in Appendix.

(35) Preface to the journal of Father Combe on the last years of Sister Mary of the Cross.

of mine, had it from some bishop that, "This girl, who had strayed from the path, was causing the holy Bishop of Autun a lot of problems, that she was causing a schism over an inheritance she was disputing with him." This information did not stop me writing my pamphlet. If the shepherdess had gone to the bad, it was her affair. Her disloyalty should not prevent Christians from taking heed of the warnings of the Most Holy Virgin. I would call attention to the extreme gravity of these warnings.

"The pamphlet appeared in July, 1894 (36). Thanks to it I was soon in correspondence with people who knew Melanie. Father Roubaud wrote to tell me that she lived in Galatina. I sent my pamphlet to her ... (37).

"One year later, Father Roubaud passed away. The letters he had received from Melanie were sent to me, and my documentation was complete. These letters were more than a treasure-trove, they gave something of a refuge for the soul, the living presence of the holy woman. Yet neither these letters nor those she had written to me, showed me the reasons for her life of wandering. I was shocked when I heard that she was to leave Galatina very soon, and for an unrevealed destination. She didn't want anyone to know! When later she wrote to me from Messina, adding that she was only to stay there for a year, it was another shock. There is something of the truth, I said to myself, in what they say about her instability: she is happy nowhere. I will stop her running for good. When her one-year lease at Messina runs out, I will have her come back to France and settle there ...

"I invited her to visit me and sent her the money for the journey. Having left Messina for Diou, she stopped off at Moncalieri, and informed me that a good portion of the money I had sent to her had been used to give bread to Canon Annibale's orphans. And so I sent some more money for the rest of her journey ... (only a hundred francs, the first lot was four hundred.)"

Melanie left Messina 2nd October 1898. She had registered her luggage as far as Turin station. When she arrived there, she set about finding accommodation. The Exhibition was on, there wasn't an empty room to be found. She went out to the suburbs, to Moncalieri, and there she rented for a year one room and a kitchen without running water and was content. Some French Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul provided her with some basic, rudimentary furniture. This was Piedmont, not quite France, but no longer Italy, and she had difficulty in understanding the dialect spoken there. Letters from Messina showed her that her retreat had been discovered. She would not find peace until after this life . . . Nevertheless, she spent the whole winter in Mon-

(36) It was approved on publication. It was only put on the Index 7th June, 1901.

(37) Melanie acknowledged receipt of it 30th January, 1896. She thanked the author. She had reservations as to the dates but found the correspondence between Isaiah and the "Secret" to be true. She spoke highly of Father Roubaud, but was sorry she could not send the Rule to Combe as he had requested: it was solely for the members of the Order of the Mother of God.

calieri (Vicolo Muratori, casa Dottore Latour). Finally, she resolved to get in touch with Father Combe.

This was not to be anything more than a visit to Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule and Diou. Leaving Moncalieri 18th May, she returned there on the 24th.

Father Combe urged her strongly to settle in France. He suggested she join the Franciscan sisters at Vichy, or the sisters of Saint-Joseph at Cusset, as a boarder. "Nuns are too curious", she replied. Moreover, the cost of boarding would be too high for her. Yet, in her obedience, she let herself be taken to Cusset and Vichy, where, invited to the house of a cousin of Father Combe, she had to eat "a rather thick soup" which took her several days to digest. They finally went to Moulins, but the search for accommodation was still fruitless. She went back, with nothing decided as yet, and leaving Combe astonished at her cheerful girlish ways (as a present, she had brought him a quantity of boxes of Italian matches made of wax), at her complete, transparent simplicity, at the humility of her way of kissing the priest's hand, and asking his blessing on her knees in the street, and at her glance, which seemed to see through walls and read hearts. Combe managed to find, through Father Moitron, parish-priest of Saint-Pourçain, a small detached house, with a rent of 150 francs a month. Melanie undertook to rent it for a year, and finally leaving Moncalieri, she arrived 18th June 1900 at Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule, and moved in under the name of Madame Barnaud.

LAST YEARS IN FRANCE

This was to be her last stay in France, five successive years at Saint-Pourçain (June 1900–June 1901), at Diou (June 1901–August 1903) and at Vichy-Cusset (August 1903–13th June, 1904). This was a time perhaps the least in tune with her character, a time of more sacrifice than ever before in Melanie's life.

After Castellamare, Rome, the retreat in Galatina, Messina, the shepherdess shut herself away in the shabby surroundings of ordinary provincial life. Far away were the brilliant Italian décors now. With her eye-sight failing more and more (a cataract on the right eye), she saw nothing but a limitless greyness. The countryside was flat and uninspiring, the air heavy, the people obsessed with gain, deceiving and devouring each other relentlessly. Because of squabbles over leases, sales and purchases, she was obliged to move house three times in five years.

Father Combe, who was born locally, was untroubled by this atmosphere, and was annoyed that this "Wild girl, the she-wolf of the woods" took fright at such everyday things. What? She had the run of a whole family house and did not go into raptures of gratitude because the gardener held on to the keys?

(38) And when he finally found her accommodation at Cusset in a property of his own, sharing with one of his cousins, a coach-painter (39), he had no idea of what she was going through, bitter disputes over a letter-box, the vulgar, heathen promiscuity.

Her fear of being seen, her terror of being under observation made people think her mad. When a worthy neighbour expressed surprise at this (*she* couldn't care less if people looked at her), Melanie replied gently,

"You, you are of this world, I am not of this world."

But no one understood.

Father Moitron and Father Combe had urged her to take in, at Saint-Pourçain, her now widowed sister, Julie Oddos, for help with the house-work and for company. This she did, but the said Julie started spying, gossiping, telling stories, and describing Melanie as a religious hypocrite, a wicked woman, making her an object of malicious curiosity, and without knowing why, perhaps without wanting to, she began to persecute her.

"For several months," Melanie writes, "I haven't translated a single word (of her Italian autobiography, which de Brandt had removed from the hands of Annibale), for the simple reason that I am not alone in this single room. My sister has the same sort of nature as my poor mother, and more so, as she can read and write ... I write my letters at night when she is in bed ... All this comes from my being over-sensitive ... I am in need of the virtue of patience. Good Lord! Have Mercy! ... My dear sister is in the hands of our most loving Jesus, the blessed rod which He holds. Yet she is very good ... she had bad nerves and has been anaemic for more than ten years. Perhaps too, this illness may have affected her brain, she is in no way guilty. Her character is the image of that of my poor mother ... In short, she is bored in my company, and I can't go with her to the theatre, to dances etc ..."

"This Friday, I told her that, since she was bored, I would not stop her if she wanted to leave, and I handed her the money for the journey ... Today it is still on the table. I have no idea what she's going to do with it." (To de Brandt, 19th May, 11th June, 1900.)

Only when she left Saint-Pourçain—the little house had been sold, and had to be vacated—was she delivered of Madame Oddos. She had written to Father Combe,

"I am longing to get away from here. People regard me as heartless." (13th June, 1900).

And so at last she was on her own, in Diou, a few yards from the church and the rectory. But her parish-priest was to be the main cause of her suffering.

(38) There was more: a "Stench of sin" which came from a recess in this house, and poisoned the whole place for Melanie. (Combe's diary.)

(39) He had her pay her 300 francs rent, and she gave him the required notice in February, 1904.

He was at first uncomprehending, but edified, and then filled with wonder at what he had glimpsed of the depths of supernatural life which Melanie's soul tried to keep hidden. He sought avidly to seize its elusive reality. Unconsciously, his curiosity became cruel; he hurled question after question at his "subject", and often demanded lengthy written answers to his interrogations. He pestered her continually to finish the French translation of her Italian publication of Messina. She was a good daughter, obedient to the Father she had been given (your paternity, your reverence, she said to him) and tried to carry out his wishes. But delicacy kept her from making a literal translation. Canon Annibale could take the outpourings of the state of infused contemplation, but Father Combe, greedy for facts and anecdotes, wanted nothing but historical detail. And thus as the days went by, the 1900 autobiography took shape, with all its appendices and additions. Father Combe wanted to know everything, he wanted to touch, in a way to feel in his hand, the phenomena of the life of union with Christ, which was Melanie's secret life. So that she could lend herself to his investigation, he brought her out of her silent recollection during Advent and Lent. He had her show him the cloth which had staunched the blood from the wound in her side—her stigmata had started bleeding again at Diou, to an exhausting degree. In pain, but obedient as ever, she fell in with this documentary collection which Combe, with a tenacity now almost fanatical, was putting together for posterity; as long as it served to illuminate the Divine Message, to convert wayward souls, he saw little need to be gentle with the scalpel and microscope of the exacting observer.

She, however, was growing old. Accustomed to the mediterranean Italian climate, she suffered from the cold and the dampness. Sometimes she felt "the pains of death" (40). An attempt to prepare and drink, as everyone does, some beef-tea, made her seriously ill. On the 25th January, 1903, she received Extreme Unction, "Quite content", she wrote to Canon de Brandt on the 28th. For two months she remained weak and in pain, "too happy to suffer."

Her most agonising pain had another source. The general lack of faith, of observance of the Sabbath, the continual blasphemy, these were a torment to her. To keep people coming to church, priests made concessions which completely undermined a holy fear of God. She reproached Combe for allowing women to enter the confessional bare-headed. She saw the slide from small compromises to serious shortcomings and to the loss of a sense of sin.

"It is not the wicked who sadden me (41), but the apathy, the criminal indifference of the whole of society . . . Oh, I am in so great a need of my Lord's help! And there is no Mass tomorrow! Such is life in this village when the pastor is absent—a sorry place, this, an evil place!"

(40) Letters to Canon de Brandt, 28th January and 4th March 1903.

(41) Letter to de Brandt, from Diou, 13th November, 1901.

On several occasions she had felt the urge to leave and go back to Italy. As early as 3rd December she had written to de Brandt,

"I am asking to be allowed to go away from here." But, once Melanie put her trust in a priest, she looked upon him as her superior, and believed that obedience to him was her duty. She was to leave Cusset, after Diou, only with the permission of Father Combe.

With his permission, she went to La Salette on three occasions. In 1901, she went with Combe himself, his friend Father Parent and Canon Rigaux joined them. In 1902, she was met at Paray-le-Monial by Rigaux, alone and there, completely unexpectedly, was able to receive communion from Cardinal Perraud. They walked up to the holy mountain together. Finally, in July 1903, she made her way there again, for the last time, accompanied by Canon Rigaux. There had been big changes at La Salette. During her pilgrimage of September, 1901, when questioned by the missionaries, who were troubled by the laws of eviction, Melanie had told them,

"The Madonna will sweep you all up!" (42) Without authorisation, it seems they left, on the spur of the moment, and even left France. In September, 1902, they were replaced by local chaplains, who came up to serve the sanctuary from May until October.

The rumours which had been spread about Melanie in the days of Bishop Fava and Father Berthier had not reached them, and they greeted the shepherdess with all the signs of a most affectionate and deep respect.

"Now", Melanie wrote (43), "now that, happily, the Fathers have been replaced by the Chaplains of Our Lady of La Salette, who seem to possess the spirit of humility, of charity, of detachment from transitory things, of piety, of zeal, of mortification, of perfect unity, and a true, lasting and wholly filial love for our Mother Mary, I can, without fear of giving scandal, renew our links with my dear mountain, and begin correspondence with the Chaplains of the Mother of God. I believe that this unity of purpose, for the same cause, will benefit the people of Corps, and will not harm pilgrims. I shall write the first letter, God willing, around Christmas, in the Italian tradition." (44). The following year, the mood had changed, another bitter disappointment.

Canon de Brandt died on the 9th May, 1903. Presumably, from the point of view of the Order of the Mother of God, Canon Rigaux was his heir. Melanie went to see him at Argoeuvres in 1902 (27th September to 2nd October) and again in 1903 (8th to 18th August).

On her return from Argoeuvres, Melanie found she would be obliged to leave Diou. The house which she had rented had been sold, completely without her knowledge, to a gentleman who wished to move in immediately.

(42) Repeated by Melanie to Combe (Diary, September, 1901).

(43) Letter to de Brandt, 24th November, 1902.

(44) The account, a rather emotional one, of Melanie's visit is recorded in the *Annals of Our Lady of La Salette*, edition of November, 1902, pages 97 to 110.

The parish priest tried in vain to act as a peacemaker. The letters he wrote were rather hysterical and quite useless. It was his opinion, anyway, that Melanie ought to move house. Father Parent, who had been suspended by his Bishop, and who was becoming more and more carried away by his imagination, spread some insane stories about La Salette and the "Secret". It was these examples of gross stupidity which caused the "Great Coup" to be put on the Index. He pursued Melanie continually with his letters, giving her deplorable publicity.

Melanie would have been more than happy to take the opportunity of actually leaving and returning to Italy. But she did not yet know where to go. Father Fusco had taken it upon himself to find her a resting-place, and she was waiting for news from him, which was not swift in arriving by any means. And so once more she yielded to Combe's entreaties that she stay in the area. She accepted the rather mediocre accommodation at Cusset.

A sorry port of call it was for her, too, deprived of all spiritual aid but the none too frequent visits of Father Combe. In these ten months of darkness, there came an end to the moral agony of the last five years in the life of "Sister Victim of Jesus".

At last, she received a letter from Father Fusco. He had found his dear Melanie a resting-place in southern Italy, under the protection of his friend, Father Cecchini, the Dominican of Valle di Pompei, now Bishop of Altamura. Altamura is an ancient city in the province of Bari. It was built on the high plateau which lies between the shores of the Adriatic and the Mediterranean. There, she could breathe. There she would be in the safekeeping of the Bishop, she would have Mass and Communion every day, and she would enjoy recollection without distraction which is the preparation for a serene end ...

Combe had been childish enough to wish that she were ill, so that she could not leave. He was beginning to get to know her, but was not succeeding in realising his burning desire (like the interior order set out for him) to pack up and leave the diocese of Moulins himself, there and then, and France as well. She had said to him in a letter of 29th January, 1904,

"The state of France frightens me ... You, my Father, would have me resigned like the French. I do not have such an inclination in me, and I do not see it in Saint Paul. The Divine Master does not urge his children to stay where they are not heard, but ... to shake off the dust ... and go somewhere else ..."

ALTAMURA

Somewhere else was Altamura. On 13th July, 1904, she left Cusset and without stopping off, travelling day and night, she arrived in Altamura on the 16th July, at ten p.m.

It was dark. Father Fusco had still been unsure, after so many announcements of delays, of the exact time of her arrival, and had not informed the Bishop's palace. Bishop Cecchini, moreover, was away himself, so there was no-one to meet her at the station. Quite exhausted, her feet and hands badly swollen, Melanie painfully made her way alone up the long road to the town, looking in vain for a hotel.

Someone pointed out a place where there would surely be a bed for her. So great was her need for sleep, that she went on in without enquiring further. It was a house of ill-repute . . . The next day, she made known her arrival to the vicar-general. The information was passed on to Bishop Cecchini, who had sent a dispatch recommending the greatest care to be taken of her, and priests and notable figures of the town came to visit her in that disreputable place, much to the horror of the mistress of the house, who finally begged her to leave. She had stayed there seven days, deprived of all the essentials, but quite content . . . She had even declined an invitation from the noble family of Giannuzzi, whom the Bishop had asked to receive her.

"I was fine", she said, "in that disreputable house". There was always a surprise in store, with the shepherdess of La Salette (45).

Only when she had nowhere to go did she accept the hospitality of "la distinta Signora Emilia Giannuzzi" and let herself be taken to her "Villino" in the country, to rest her weary and very old bones. Later, Bishop Cecchini returned and had her taken in at the Visitation, while suitable accommodation was found. Her one desire was the solitude and poverty so dear to her. A few weeks later, at the end of August, she moved into her new home, 87 Estramurale—outside the walls, at the foot of Mount Calvary . . . (Montecalvario).

The rumours of the world outside still reached her ears. Her sisters had realised that the shepherdess of La Salette could serve as bait for donations and gifts. Madame Guignier was making prophecies in her name! Father Combe sent her newspapers and disclosed his pessimistic feelings to her.

But the remoteness of it all, the splendid brightness of the sky, the paternal tenderness of the Bishop, the touching piety of the inhabitants countered melancholy, and filled her heart with a peaceful joy. "Go joyfully!" she repeated to the sad Father Combe.

Every morning, she walked down to the Cathedral. On the 15th December, she did not appear during the whole morning. Bishop Cecchini sent his manservant to her. The house was locked. The authorities were informed and came to break open the door. Melanie was dead, lying peacefully, fully clothed, on her bedroom floor.

In February, 1903 (46), she had announced how she would die.

She was in Diou, convalescing after the illness which had caused the just

(45) Letter to Father Combe from Altamura, 2nd July, 1904.

(46) Combe's diary, 24th February, 1903; conversation with Mlle. Marie Brabin.

sacraments to be given to her. The lady who looked after her, Mademoiselle Marie Brabin, kept her key as a precaution. She told her,

"In case you died all on your own and nobody knew! They would break down your door and find you dead."

"Ah!" Melanie replied, "That's how I shall die ... but not here ... I shall die in Italy—in a place I do not know—where I don't know anybody—an almost savage place—but where people do not swear—and where they love the Good Lord—I shall be alone. One fine morning—they will see my shutters all closed,—they will force open the door—and they will find me dead." The Misses Brabin repeated these eleven circumstances of the death of our most dear Melanie, to me, when I was in Diou, 6th August, 1916.

According to Canon Annibale di Francia, in note 17 of his "Elogio" of the Shepherdess of La Salette spoken in the Cathedral of Altamura, 14th December, 1905, two citizens of Altamura were ready to swear on oath that they heard, from the bedroom of the pious French lady, when the evening Angelus rang on 14th December, 1904, a heavenly chorus singing the tune of the *Tantum Ergo*, and the tinkling of a bell, as if Holy Communion was being brought to someone. It is probable that Melanie received Communion from Jesus Christ Himself.

In honour of the memory of the Shepherdess of La Salette, Bishop Cecchini decided to build a convent and a church on Montecлавario. He was transferred, in 1909, to the Archbishopric of Tarente (where he died, 17th December, 1916), and was unable to realise his plans fully. He entrusted their completion to his successor, Bishop Verrienti. In 1916, an "orfanotrofio antoniano" of Canon Annibale di Francia of Messina, was set up in the now finished convent. Permission was therefore given, for 19th September 1918, for the disinterment of the virginal corpse of Melanie, which lay in the "gentilizio" of "Signorina Giannuzzi". It took place at three a.m., the skeleton was found intact. Canon di Francia and twelve "suore antoniane" took the precious remains back to the Church of L'Antoniano. It was a calm and peaceful night, not a breath of wind, a cloudless sky, the surrounding countryside lit up by the moon over the sleeping town. The transfer had been carried out at night because of the Spanish Fever which was sweeping the country. They arrived at L'Antoniano at five o'clock, to the chanting of the Magnificat and the welcome of the orphans, each with a lighted candle in his hand. Then Canon di Francia celebrated Holy Mass at six o'clock.

After Mass, the precious remains were moved to a small room adjoining the garden, before being placed in a magnificent tomb in the middle of the church, which was dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. The skeleton was reconstructed in full, and stood up on a wooden pedestal, then dressed in the holy garments of the "Suore Antoniane" (sisters of Anthony).

The "tumulazione" took place, in the presence of Canon Gengo, vicar-general, and Canon Maggi, of the diocesan authority. When, a year later, the splendid monument was finished, 19th September, 1919, Canon di Francia

showed, in a second eulogy that Altamura possessed a great treasure in the remains of Sister Mary of the Cross:

"Our mission has not ended", he added, "We must begin the process of learning the heroic virtues of this woman, a servant of God, and the miracles granted through her intercession. At Taormina, one of our orphan-girls was cured instantly of a stomach ulcer: 'I am Melanie who has come to cure you.' Melanie touched her, our orphan-girl was cured immediately and the recovery was duly confirmed by the two doctors treating her ... People of Altamura, do not forget your treasure ... Pilgrims will come here in great numbers, when the Church has placed on Her Altar the privileged Shepherdess of La Salette."—*Dio eil Prossimo*, monthly journal of the "Orfanotrofi Antoniano of Messina, December, 1918, June 1920, September, 1920, May 1921, July 1921.

Marguerite ARON
who disappeared at Auschwitz en 1944.

Father Paul Gouin,
Parish-priest of Avoise (Sarthe).

Avoise, 31st May, 1954.

APPENDIX I

SIGHT OF THE COSTUME AND THE INSTITUTIONS IN WHICH THE SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF THE ORDER OF THE MOTHER OF GOD WILL BE EMPLOYED

While the Most Holy Virgin was giving me the Rule and speaking about the Apostles of the Last Days, I could see an immense plain dotted with small hills. My eyes could see everything. I do not know if they were my bodily eyes ... But I should be closer to the truth if I said that I saw the earth underneath me, so that I could see the whole universe and its inhabitants, going about their business, each according to his position (not always out of justice, but rather out of ambition. And, through God's just punishment, they were at war with each other).

And so I saw this immense plain with its inhabitants. In certain areas men were white, in others, they were the colour of wood, or various lighter and darker shades. In other parts I saw men who were nearly yellow, the colour of very light straw with red eyes. In other parts they were as black as coal. I saw parts where the inhabitants were of small build, and others where they were of very large build. And then, I saw that missionaries and nuns were in these countries and in every part of the globe.

I saw the Apostles of the Last Days in their costume. They wore a rather coarse, black cassock with no buttons, but fasteners instead, on the hooded cape as well as the cassock. Their hats were rather rough, with well-formed corners (1). Their belts were white, of a coarse cloth. They were about as wide as this line (2)

and the ends hung down almost to the bottom of the cassock. On one end of the belt were these three letters, in red: M. P. J. (Mourir pour Jésus—To Die for Jesus). On the other end were these three letters in blue (3): E. D. M. (Enfant de Marie—Child of Mary).

They all wore quite a large crucifix, which hung around the neck on a thick,

(1) Three corners, she explained.

(2) The line Melanie drew was 112mm. long.

(3) Sky-blue (Melanie's verbal explanation).

black cord. The end of the foot of the cross tucked into the belt, on the left-hand side. But when they preached or performed some religious function, it hung on the chest. On the right-hand side of the belt there hung a rosary, and on the rosary was a crucifix without a Christ. I saw that the Apostles of the Last Days had white shoes (black when travelling long distances) with a buckle on top.

The NUNS WHO WERE THE FIRST TO ENTER THE ORDER of the Mother of God were the nuns of the Providence of Grenoble. I saw two of them with a SINGLE LAY SISTER. They were AMONG THE FIRST to wear the costume, having taken the spirit, and then the costume of the Order, on the Day of the Incarnation of the Divine Redeemer (4). I saw that their dress was coarse and black, roughly shaped like a sack (5), with wide sleeves. Their shoes were white with buckles on top. The belt, the rosary and the crucifix were like those of the fathers. They did not have a bonnet, but some white material which surrounded their faces. On top there was a black veil which hung quite low at the back. They wore a kind of white hooded cloak.

I saw the missionaries preaching, hearing confessions, helping the dying, giving retreats to priests (6), to kings and their courts, the great, to soldiers, workers, the poor, to children, all kinds of monks and all kinds of nuns, to married and single women. I saw, in certain places, the missionaries at the side of the sick, the poor, prisoners, baptising children and adults.

In other places, I saw the DISCIPLES of the Apostles of the Last Days. I understood quite clearly that these gentlemen I call the DISCIPLES, WERE PART OF THE ORDER. These were unattached men, young people who did not feel themselves called to the priesthood, yet wanted to embrace a christian life, save their own souls. They accompanied the fathers on some of their missions and worked with all their might for their own sanctification and for the salvation of souls. They were very holy and full of zeal for the glory of God. These disciples were at the side of the sick who did not wish to confess their sins; at the side of the poor, the wounded, visiting meetings, prisons, sects etc., etc. I even saw some of them eating and drinking with Godless people and those who did not wish to hear about God or priests. And these terrestrial angels endeavoured, by all conceivable means, to speak to them and lead them to God, and save these poor souls, each one of which has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, who overflows with love for us. This sight was very clear and precise, and left no doubt in my mind as to what I was seeing. I was full of admiration for the greatness of God, His love for mankind, and His holy ingenuity in trying to save them all. And I could see

(4) They were not to be the first. In any case the first sisters were not to have the costume as yet, when the sisters Corenc appeared (Melanie's verbal explanation).

(5) i.e. with no waist (Melanie's verbal explanation).

(6) In conversation she also said, "With bishops".

that His Love cannot be understood on earth, for He is above everything the holiest of men can comprehend.

And I saw the Gospel of Jesus Christ being preached in all its purity to all the nations of the world.

I saw that the nuns were fully occupied with all kinds of spiritual and corporal works, and were spread, like the missionaries, all over the earth.

With them there were women and girls filled with zeal, who helped the nuns in their works. These widows and girls were PERSONS, who did not wish TO BIND THEMSELVES BY RELIGIOUS VOWS, but desired to serve the Good Lord, go about their own salvation, and lead their life, WITHDRAWN FROM THE WORLD. They were dressed in black, very simply (7). They wore a crucifix on the chest, too, like the disciples, but a little smaller than the one the missionaries wore, and it was not worn on the outside.

I saw and understood that the Apostles of the Last Days and the nuns took the three religious vows. In addition, they made a promise to give themselves, and to give to the Most Holy Virgin, for souls in purgatory, for the conversion of sinners, all their prayers, all their penance, in a word, all their deeds of merit. The Disciples and the women also made this promise or oblation to the Most Holy Virgin.

I saw that the missionaries lived in community, and that they chanted the Divine Office together in choir. Some of their houses had few members. I saw that the disciples who could read recite the little office of Our Lady in their chapel.

I also saw that the nuns, like the women, recited the little office of Our Lady.

I understood that it was God's wish that the Apostles of the Last Days should follow in the footsteps of the Apostles of the early Church of Jesus Christ, except that the Superior General should take care to call together, when possible, every year, the members of the Order to make a ten day retreat at the central house. And I saw that when members of the Order were very far away, the retreat took place in each separate house, or they gathered in the central house of their Province. These retreats had the aim of renewing their resources of fervour, and observance of the Rule.

I saw that the Superiors changed and sent some members to one of the Houses of the order, set up expressly for the care of the infirm and those members who had lost their early fervour through the influence and contagion of the great ones of the earth, and had become slack and lost their charity and zeal. The sick were well looked after in this house (8).

(7) Melanie wore their costume. Inside she had a small bonnet.

(8) Considering the way Melanie speaks here, it is probable, I suggest, that the "weak" and the "sick" concerned here are spiritually weak and sick.

I saw that our sweet Saviour looked down on the workers of this Order with much satisfaction, for they were serving the Good Lord with complete and utter devotion, without a thought for themselves. Being completely detached from the things of this earth, they were fully in the hands of the Providence of God, filled with faith and trust in Him.

I saw the souls in Purgatory rejoicing, at the benefits they were receiving from the Apostles of the Last Days and the Nuns; and I saw that souls suffering in Purgatory, who had been delivered, or who still had something to atone for, and who had the power to do so, were praying a great deal, and many conversions took place because of their prayers. For I saw that God wished the missionaries and the nuns of this Order to put all their prayers, penances and good works in the hands of Mary, their first Superior, and their Mistress, for the souls in Purgatory, and for the conversion of sinners everywhere.

I saw and understood that the Good Lord wished this Order to fight against all the abuses which had brought decadence to the Clergy and the religious life, and ruined Christian Society.

Many Orders and religious Congregations returned to their first fervour, thanks to the care and example of the Fathers. Many others based themselves on the Order of the Mother of God.

I saw that the Order *never, ever* took in as missionaries or nuns anyone whose parents needed other people's charity, or needed their son or daughter to help them. And when the parents of one of the members were going through hard times, the community, out of love for the Fourth Commandment, out of prudence, charity, and for the peace of mind of its members whose parents were suffering, would give generously, according to need, to the family. And this was done with great charity, with great joy, and gratitude towards God, for giving the community the opportunity of lightening the burden of the followers of Jesus, who gave Himself totally to us.

I saw that the members of the Order of the Mother of God made every effort to rid themselves completely of the spirit of the corrupt world, to advance in the love of God and to acquire the virtues of Our Lord Jesus Christ. They had a very low opinion of themselves. They were very united among themselves, for they had neither ambition, nor envy, nor jealousy, nor any desire but to please their Divine Master, nor any desire for anything outside the Heart of Jesus, where they lived in varying degrees of closeness, depending on the purity and generosity of their love. This love of Jesus yielded in them the fruits of great obedience, deep humility and simplicity, of great mortification, most ardent zeal, and perfect surrender into the hands of the Divine Master.

I saw that this Order was like the home of all Institutions, and like a

perpetual altar where there was unceasing prayer for the various needs of Holy Church, for feeble souls and for the conversion of sinners everywhere (9).

Sister Mary of the Cross,
the poor Shepherdess of La Saleite.
23rd November, 1876.
Castellamare di Stabia.
And 5th January, 1879,
Rome.

(Archives of the Holy Congregation of
Religious Brothers.)

(9) Melanie Calvat reviewed this text in Diou, Allier, 24th May, 1899, and changed nothing. She explained a few points to Father Combe, which are set down in the eight notes at the bottom of the preceeding pages. In his Exhortation to the priests and preachers of Rome, His Holiness Pope Pius XII asked for co-workers to be found, to go where a priest may not go. (Osservatore Romano, 28:2:54.) A religious Order was appointed to train "intellectually and spiritually" these lay co-workers. The Disciples of the Order of the Mother of God would know better than anyone how to open "the doors in souls where no priest could enter".

APPENDIX II

THE LAST TWO LETTERS OF THE SHEPHERDESS OF LA SALETTE

To: Father Combe
Parish priest of Diou (Allier).

Altamura, 13th December, 1904.
(Day before her death).

My very Reverend and most dear Father,
May Jesus be loved by all heart!

You are, you say, still disheartened, my most dear Father, and yet you know, much better than I, that discouragement does not come from God. You have your parish, and above all your parishioners to preach the Gospel to, to teach the catechism to, your sick to visit, your poor to help, and that is the sacred duty of any priest who is aware of his high mission. For the love of God, try to gain the affection of your parishioners, do not brush them aside, love them, love their souls, for which our most Loving Jesus gave all His blood.

It will pain you, no doubt, but do you not realise that before you die you have to die more a hundred deaths from the violence done to our poor, wretched nature, bent on self-satisfaction, from the patience needed to suffer kindly the poor peasants, often deprived of any religious instruction, from patience and tenderness shown to every man?

And apart from what the priest owes to the souls in his care, must he not, for these souls and for himself, offer ardent beseechings to God on High, the rosary, Divine Service, contemplation or at least some spiritual reading, and the application of some serious book? No, no, a good priest is never bored, he doesn't have the time to be bored, nor to be disheartened, no, never.

... With all my heart I protest at the publication of the Rule and the Sight, all the more so, for I have not received the order to give pearls to the dogs. Oh! prudence, how you are flouted! ...

My regards to you and to all our friends and i ask you, my very Reverend

and most dear Father, to bless your most affectionate, lowly and useless servant.

CALVAT.

P.S. Allegramente, let us do all the good we can, let us save souls, let us save them with great sacrifices, with great patience and tenderness, let us forget ourselves for the sake of souls.

To: Father Mesièrè
Parish priest of Labbeville
(S.et.—O.)

Altamura, 14th December, 1904.

My most Reverend Father,
May Jesus be loved in every heart!

Your kind letter of the 28th November arrived the day before yesterday, 12th December, and that is why, although during Advent, a time of penance, I am hurrying to write you these few lines, God willing.

Despite my very deep and very real unworthiness, with all my heart I join my feeble prayers to yours, so fervent, for the return to God of these poor souls, which are the price of the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ. Let us save them, not only through our beseechings, but also through sacrifice and humility.

Your reverence, as one sent by God to preach the Gospel to his parish, knows much better than I, an ignorant, lowly shepherdess, what you have to do, if there is terrible persecution, persecution which we desired, which we have, as it were, torn from the hands of divine Justice.

A priest should be, in all things and everywhere, the true model of the virtues practised by our Loving Jesus Christ in his holy state of God made man. We know, from the words of life, that is, the Holy Gospel, that Jesus spent His nights at prayer, and He spent His days teaching the crowds that followed Him. He cured the sick, the weak in spirit and in body, and thousands upon thousands of other good deeds, but enough of that.

It is pointless for the clergy to have any more illusions about its tortuous path, and the surrender in mental and verbal prayer. The poor people who see through it all, have ended up leaving the Church and seeking distraction

elsewhere. Poor people! Poor France and the poor clergy, who, through their egotism, have lost the true light of Eternal Wisdom.

It is written somewhere, that he who has been faithful in the little things (the small parts of his duty) will be so in the big things. And, in truth, these egotistical priests who have sought only to satisfy their nature, their senses, transitory wealth etc., how will they have the grace to refuse, if asked to take the oath, for prison, hunger, the guillotine or a firing squad await them? Blessed, and a thousand times blessed are those priests who live close to the Heart of the Lord, and who serve Him and love Him in spirit and in truth with the Virgin Mary, blessed are all those who sacrifice themselves at the side of their parishioners to console them in their troubles, give them heart in afflictions, lighten the burden of their poverty, teach them the ways of God which lead to eternal glory in the Heaven of Heavens.

I shall reply to your question, my most Reverend Father, though do not feel bound to believe me, for I am ignorance itself. Let us say that I possess the highest and most far-reaching title on this earth, let us say that, I AM A PRIEST OF GOD ON HIGH. I have two parishes to serve and to save. Myself, I have always preached freely, because I am a Minister of my Creator and Saviour, and my mission is to teach the souls entrusted to me by God. The sects of the devil have me observed in order to find a reason to put me in prison and to throw me in the Seine with a stone around my neck. One day, a friend comes to tell me that the sect have decided to come and take me. "Run, run!" my friends tell me. I must reply. "No." I have the care of souls, I will not willingly abandon them. They may lead me away, but I tell you I will not abandon my flock, they may carry me, drag me, but I will not leave my parishes, no more the one who has living faith than the one who is indifferent in its dying faith. The pastor must stay at his post, and if necessary, die with his lambs, for to do otherwise would be a crime, a betrayal of God and souls. No, a parish-priest should not run away from his persecutors. God will save his chosen ones. And yet it needs the blood of the righteous to appease so Divine Justice.

I ask you, my most Reverend Father, to bless your most respectful, lowly and useless servant.

Melanie Calvat, Shepherdess of La Salette.



SALVATORE LUIGI

DEL SACRO ED APOSTOLICO ORDINE

DOTTORE IN SACRA TEOLOGIA

VESCOVO



DE' CONTI ZOLA

DE' CANONICI REGOLARI LATERANESI

PER LA GRAZIA DI DIO E DELLA S. SEDE

DI LECCE

*Attestiamo, e ci costa intimamente, come Suor Maria del
la Croce, nata Melania Calvat, non è stata mai scomunicata.
Lo si fece in Francia la minaccia di scomunica, ma siamo cer-
ti che tale minaccia non si è mai realizzata. Attestiamo an-
cora che la suddetta non fu mai privata dei sacramenti in
Italia, e per la verità ne rilasciamo la presente testimonianza
la segnata di nostra mano, e munita di nostro sigillo.*

Lecce, dal Nostro Episcopio, addì 28 Maggio 1895.

+ Palo: Luigi Facci di Lecce



Giovanni Can^{co} Facci Segr^o 13

Attestation autographe de
Mgr ZOLA, évêque de LECCE.

3 avril 1879

N^o 1.

Ma très-cher M^{lle}...

(Comme je vois, que Melonie tarde à répondre —
je ne veux différer ^{le plus} à vous remercier bien cordialement
de votre si chère et obligeante Lettre du 27. mars, et de
si douloureux souvenir de la jeune aussi de la Sœur Lorraine
qui a été ravie de celui que vous lui avez envoyé —
et qu'elle a infiniment agréé. et elle aura bien un
souvenir très spécial de vous dans le plein adorable de
l'épaulé de M. S. pour laquelle elle a eu toujours une
dévotion particulière. — Elle et moi vous offrons nos plus
vifs remerciements avec nos plus distincts respects, et très
heureux souhaits pour la St. Pasque, vous assurant de nos
prières surtout dans ces saints jours —

Quant à la si bonne Melonie, je vous dirai, qu'elle est
pour nous un objet d'édification par sa très vertueuse
et sainte Conduite, et elle se prête aussi très charitablement pour
une jeune Sœur très malade qu'elle assiste nuit, et jour, selon

besoin Sa mortification est très remarquable aussi,
et je vous réjouis nous sommes très édifiés d'elle
Pour ce qui regarde les grâces qu'elle a reçues de
la ^{Ste} Vierge nous n'osons^{pas} en parler, car elle
est très réservée sur ce point — et nous n'osons
pas l'interroger; ce que nous pouvons assurer,
est qu'elle est très bonne et vertueuse —

Si vous avez occasion d'écrire au P. Marie à Retirbonne,
vous pouvez lui dire que la Visitation de Rome se souvient
de lui, et que se recommande bien particulièrement à
ses saintes prières —

Ayez pour moi mes très chères M^{lle} de nos plus reconnais-
sants, et affectueux sentiments, dont je vous en offre
l'expression, et avec lesquels je suis bien sincèrement

Du Mon^{te} de la Visitation
de Rome ce 3. Avril 1879

P. S. Vous êtes trop bonne à
nous envoyer les Bollini, nous
sommes confus de votre obligeance

Votre très humble et dévouée
servante —

M^{lle} Thérèse Capot^{te} Dup^{ré}

Pala 3^{ème} S. M. D. S. B.

Lettre autographe de la Supérieure de la Visitation de Rome
où Mélanie séjourna du 1er Décembre 1878 au Mai 1879 sur
ordre de Léon XIII.

PRAYER TO THE HOLY TRINITY

to obtain the glorification of Its humble servant Sr Mary of the Cross Shepherdess of La Salette, née Melanie CALVAT.

O most Blessed Trinity, source of all sanctification, we offer You through the propitious hands of Our Lady of La Salette, Reconciler of sinners, our poor reparations of so many satanic blasphemies, so many profanations of Sundays and Holidays of Obligation, an equally proud contempt for the absolute obligation of prayer, penance and mortification. Make all know the greatness of Your love for all men, appreciate the heavenly treasures which give the perfect renunciation of self and to the world and so subordinate earthly things to the uniquely vital work of eternal salvation.

These gifts were the attribute of Melanie, the faithful messenger of the Queen of Heaven and through her merits we beg them of You. Grant us her virtues of predilection, humility, self denial, charity and still more to prove her standing with Your Infinite Majesty, grant through her intercession that our prayers, full of faith, trust and love may obtain for us the favour . . . while submitting ourselves to Your Divine Will whatever that may be. We thank You for all Your spiritual and temporal benefits, thereby to deserve to come and adore You in the eternal happiness of Heaven. Amen
“MAY JESUS BE LOVED BY ALL HEARTS!”

Three Pater, Ave and Gloria for the glory of the adorable Trinity and in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Imprimatur Fr. Albertus L. epidi Ord. Praed. S.P.A.Mag. 6th June 1922
Rome . . .

Should any grace requested and obtained through the Intercession of Sr. Mary of the Cross, Melanie Calvat, please let us know so that it could help to advance the cause of her Beatification.



MOURIR POUR JESUS

ENFANT de MARIE

OUR LADY of LA SALETTE

Sept. 19, 1846

M. GUILLO



Fr. Marie O'Neil, S.M.

OUR LADY OF LA SALETTE

Reconciler of sinners, pray without
ceasing for us, who have recourse to thee.

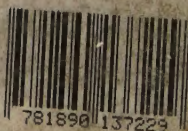
(300 days' indulgence)



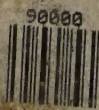


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Sanctuary of Our Lady of La Salette, France

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